PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FOR NONSUPERVISORS AT FARM SERVICE AGENCY

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Section 1: Introduction to Performance Management at FSA

BACKGROUND

The start of the 21st century is a vitally important time for the Federal government. Growing fiscal pressures, increased public scrutiny, rising public expectations for better, more responsive results, the impact of terrorism, and the requirements of a changing society place enormous pressure on Federal agencies to respond in ways different than they have used to date.

Creating a more effective Government depends on attracting, developing, and retaining quality employees from diverse backgrounds and ensuring that they perform at high levels. Congress recognized that a sound investment in human capital was essential to achieving an agency's mission when it passed the Chief Human Capital Officers Act of 2002. This act required the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to design a set of systems for assessing the management of human capital by Federal agencies and resulted in the development of the Human Capital Assessment and Accountability Framework (HCAAF).

A key implementing system of the HCAAF is the Results-oriented Performance Culture. To meet the outcome standards for this system, Federal agencies must establish and maintain a performance management system that concentrates on employees achieving results that link to the agency's organizational goals. This includes holding managers accountable for their contributions to results, and recognizing and rewarding contributions of the workforce to organizational goals.

Results-based performance management provides a way of focusing on what an agency does instead of solely on what it spends and leads to agency and individual performance accountability through measurable and observable results.

AUDIENCE FOR THIS DESK GUIDE

This Desk Guide is a text version of the Overview of Performance Management at FSA computer-based training (CBT) designed for FSA nonsupervisors. These tools are designed to help you, the nonsupervisor, develop a better understanding of the components of the performance management system at FSA, the purpose, how performance management impacts you, your role in the system, and the roles of others.

THE FIVE-LEVEL SYSTEM

The five-level system is meant to:

- Align performance plans with agency goals
- Focus work on those activities that are most important to mission accomplishment
- Hold all employees accountable for achieving their part of mission results to support agency goals
- Identify top performers
- Reward individuals and/or teams for contributions to agency goals.

This philosophy is reflected in the five-level system rating process. The following pages detail the following components of the performance appraisal process:

- Elements and measurable standards
- Element rating levels
- Summary rating levels
- Performance appraisal form and timeframes
- Responsibilities.

Elements and Measurable Standards

There are key requirements for elements and standards under the five-level system. Each of these concepts will be explained and defined in sections 2 through 4.

- Each employee must have a minimum of three job elements and a maximum of five elements.

- One critical job element must link to FSA and USDA mission, goals, and outcomes. The strategic plan is the basis for the cascade linking across the USDA to the FSA, and to each employee. The strategic plan is available at: http://bpms.wdc.usda.gov/bpms.htm

- As of Fall 2006, EEO/Civil Rights is no longer a required element for nonsupervisors. There is required language related to EEO/Civil Rights that must be included either as a stand-alone element, or to be added to another element. This language is included in Appendix B.

- One element must be noncritical.

- Nonsupervisors must have language in their measurable standards relating Health and Safety under an appropriate element(s). This language is included in Appendix B.

Note: FSA has offices on the five-level system that require a minimum of three and a maximum of ten elements. This is the exception and not the rule as a result of negotiated agreements.

Element Rating Levels

Under the five-level system, there are three element rating levels:

- Exceeds Fully Successful
- Fully Successful
- Does Not Meet

Summary Rating Levels

Under the five-level system, there are five summary rating levels:

- Outstanding
- Superior
- Fully Successful
- Marginal
- Unacceptable.

Critical elements are weighted 2:1.

Performance Appraisal Form and Timeframes

The five-level performance appraisal system uses Forms AD-435, AD-435A, and AD-435B. Forms AD-435A and AD-435B are used to record your performance plan.

- Form 435A is the cover page and used to record the first element.

- Additional elements are recorded on the 435B form. For example, if you have three elements, the first one is recorded on 435A; the other two are each recorded on a 435B form. Form AD-435 is used to record the summary rating.

Note: Forms AD-435, 435A, and 435B apply only to FSA offices not using EmpowHR. Offices using EmpowHR will use screens and not the actual forms.

While there is only one mandatory progress review during the rating cycle, you and your supervisor are strongly encouraged to engage in performance feedback throughout the year.

Responsibilities

Nonsupervisors, rating officials, and reviewing officials all have key responsibilities in the performance management process.

Nonsupervisors

You will continue to:

- Provide input into the development of your performance plan

- Check your understanding of expectations

- Communicate with your supervisor throughout the rating cycle
- Provide input on accomplishments
- Assist in identifying training needs to enhance your performance.

Rating Officials

Rating officials will continue to:

- Explain the link between the work unit outputs, your duties, and agency goals
- Ask you to provide input into development of their performance plans
- Provide you with informal feedback throughout the rating year
- Conduct/document at least one formal progress review for every employee during the rating year
- Complete a year-end performance rating for every employee
- Be responsible for finalizing the performance plan.

Reviewing Officials

Reviewing officials will:

- Review employees' performance standards as submitted by supervisors to ensure consistency across the work unit(s)
- Review and approve employees' performance plans

Note: Reviewing officials approve year-end ratings before supervisors (rating officials) communicate the ratings to you.

TRANSITION

This completes Section 1, Introduction. You are now ready to complete Section 2, Performance Management Overview.

Section 2: Performance Management Overview

INTRODUCTION

There are five phases in performance management. Taken together, these phases:

- Help you better understand the priorities guiding your work and your supervisor's expectations around your performance
- Help supervisors gauge your progress more effectively and convincingly
- Hold every employee (including supervisors and reviewers) accountable for achieving his or her part of agency goals
- Require supervisors and managers to be even more thoughtful about how resources are used.

This overview section discusses the:

- Five phases of performance management
- Role of communication in performance management.

This section provides the foundation for Sections 3 and 4, which deal with the specific components of performance management, elements and measurable standards.

FIVE PHASES OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Performance management is about improving FSA's effectiveness in accomplishing its mission and goals. Given that the work of the agency gets done through its people, individual performance management is about what and how well you contribute to the whole.

The following image shows the five phases of performance management.

Image: Five Phases of Performance Management

- **Planning**. This phase is about planning your work. At the beginning of the rating year, as part of your performance planning, you and your supervisor will discuss performance expectations that align your work with the organizational objectives. A significant part of the planning process that leads to effective performance management is the alignment of your individual measurable standards with the strategic objectives of the Agency so that day-to-day activities are consistent with the Agency's strategy. Without that alignment, you may be working hard and doing things right, but you may not be doing the right things in terms of the organization's strategic direction.

- **Monitoring**. Throughout the year, your supervisor continually monitors your performance by providing you with ongoing feedback and conducting progress reviews.

- **Developing**. Your supervisor is responsible for developing your capacity to perform by:

  - Addressing poor performance
  - Improving good performance
  - Training and delegating assignments that introduce new skills or higher levels of responsibilities.

- **Rating**. At the end of the rating cycle, your supervisor rates your performance for the year.

- **Rewarding**. Your supervisor rewards good performance either through performance ratings, through the awards system, or by other established means.

Although the performance management system sets checkpoints and tasks throughout the year, it does not preclude your supervisor's everyday role of managing you and the work of the office. By focusing on performance management as an ongoing, year-round system, your supervisor's focus shifts from justifying a rating at the end of the year to improving performance throughout the year.

When the supervisor's focus is on managing performance rather than judging it, frequent feedback allows you to correct any performance deficiencies before the end of the rating cycle.

ROLE OF COMMUNICATION

Communication is a critical tool in the performance management process. You and your supervisor should communicate during all five phases of the process to:

- Build an understanding of work requirements
- Understand your supervisor's expectations for your performance
- Appreciate which aspects of your performance that your supervisor would like to see continued
- Hear how to improve performance.

Open and continual communication leads to a more effective relationship between you and your supervisor and reduces stress. When you have developed a foundation from which you and your supervisor can communicate openly about performance and expectations, it allows for many benefits.

- It becomes easier for you to ask questions; for example, when you are unsure about the direction you are going, or what your supervisor is expecting of you.
- It makes it more meaningful to receive feedback from your supervisor when you have a common understanding of what you should be doing.

- It allows for conversations around mid-year adjustments in measurable standards when the situation warrants it. If, for example, you realize mid-way through the year that a performance expectation has become unrealistic based on circumstances beyond your control (i.e., the nature of your job shifted, the product being offered changed, etc.), your supervisor and you may be able to change the measure to more realistic terms.

Q12 Impact Engagement Interview [© 2003, The Gallup Organization]

Refer to Appendix B for the Q12 Impact Engagement Interview, which The Gallup Organization has generously permitted us to offer as part of your training. Those of you who work for the Deputy Administrator for Management may recognize it from the 2005 Q12 Managers' Training.

Most people recognize the Gallup name for The Gallup Poll, but the vast majority of Gallup's work is in the area of business and performance management consulting. As you can well imagine, their consulting is based on empirically proven solutions, of which the attached interview is a part.

The purpose of the interview is to provide a framework for meaningful and productive conversations between supervisors and employees on an individual basis.

The first two sets of questions are designed to gauge whether your supervisor has set and clearly communicated the right performance expectations. The third set of questions will give your supervisor feedback on whether the responsibilities they have assigned to a particular employee are a good "fit", or if the supervisor might need to make some adjustments. The final three sets of questions will provide the supervisor with a way to draw distinctions among their employees to discover how to effectively motivate and develop you as individuals - because not every employee will be driven by the same motivations, or has the same career goals.

It is important to note that this is an interview process, with a focus for the supervisor on listening and information-gathering, rather than commenting or responding. Ideally, your supervisor will be doing a lot of listening and drawing out from you information for clarity and specifics, and then restating back to you what they've heard as a check for understanding.

If you'd like any additional information on how the Engagement Interview is used, feel free to contact Joanna Barlow at 202.418.9001 or Chris Claussen at 816.926.1949. You will also find extensive background on the Q12 process, as well as invaluable wisdom from the world's best managers, in the book First, Break All the Rules by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman.

Communication - Agency Area for Improvement

The FSA Performance Management Task Force conducted an agency-wide survey in 2003 to assess the agency's performance culture. The results highlighted the following communication issues as needing improvement (a response of 70% or less indicates "needs improvement"):

- My performance plan clearly describes what is expected of me. (60%)
- Discussions with my supervisor are worthwhile. (57%)
- My supervisor reviews and evaluates our work unit's progress and shares that information with me. (49%)
- My supervisor promotes communication among different work units. (56%)
- Conversations with customers or peers provide me with meaningful feedback about how I am performing. (75%) Note: the implication is that employees receive more feedback from customers and peers than from supervisors and managers.

Because communication is such a useful tool for all employees, particularly in performance management, Section 7 is devoted to methods for improving your communication skills.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer the following questions. Refer to Appendix A for the correct answers.

Question 1

True or False? The focus of performance management is the year-end rating.

Question 2

The focus of performance management is:

A. Justifying a rating at the end of the year.

B. Continually improving performance throughout the year.

C. Discussing how employees should be providing feedback to each other.

D. Increasing communication ratings in future surveys.

TRANSITION

Since you now have an understanding of performance management concepts. You are now ready to complete Section 3, Performance Elements.

Section 3: Performance Elements

INTRODUCTION

You must know what you need to do to perform your job successfully; those expectations are established in your individual performance plan.

Performance elements tell you what you have to do and measurable standards tell you how well you have to do it.

Performance elements describe the actual work to be performed during the performance appraisal cycle. Each element describes a major and important requirement of the job upon which your performance is rated.

This section provides details about:

- Selecting mandatory performance elements
- Identifying appropriate additional elements
- Determining which elements are critical and which are noncritical.

DEVELOPING / SELECTING PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS

During the planning phase of the performance management process, supervisors must select between three and five performance elements for each nonsupervisor's performance plan.

Mandatory Elements

All FSA employees are required to have three to five elements. You and your supervisor can either create the elements to meet the needs of the job, select them from the Menu of Recommended Elements (see Appendix B), or combine your own with examples from the menu. The elements must reflect the most important aspects of the work they perform.

Nonsupervisors must have language related to EEO/Civil Rights included in their elements. The Nonsupervisory EEO/Civil Rights element may be selected or the descriptive language from that element may be combined with the descriptive language of another element. Refer to the Menu of Elements in Appendix B for more information.

At least one element must reflect measurable results that align with the agency's strategic mission, goals, and outcomes. Supervisors and employees are encouraged to link more than one element with the strategic plan, where possible.

- For example, supervisors may incorporate the link to agency mission, goals, and outcomes under Program Management and nonsupervisors may incorporate the link under Execution of Duties.

- Keep the total number of elements allowed in mind if you consider adding a new element.

Selecting Other Elements

Once the mandatory elements have been accounted for, the next step is to select other elements to complete the list of up to five total.

Apply the following questions to determine other important elements.

- What role do you play in meeting the mission and goals of the work unit? For example, if you perform customer service duties, then Customer Service is an appropriate element to include.

- What do you produce (i.e., what are your outputs - the quantifiable or measurable products or services produced in full or in part by you) as part of your work efforts? For example, if you are responsible for planning and implementing a program, then Program Management may be appropriate.

- How much time do you spend in each area? Even though you may spend equal amounts of time in several areas, make sure you consider your area of primary responsibility.

Selecting Other Elements - Example

The scenario presented for FSA will be continued throughout the remainder of the sections. The purpose of this scenario is to practice identifying the appropriate elements for a position, applying the methodology for developing measurable performance standards and evaluating performance against those standards.

Example: Selecting Other Elements

Brenda Wade is a Program Technician (PT) in a small county office where she performs a variety of duties and responsibilities, which can be broken down into five key areas:

- **Customer service.** Greeting and responding to requests from producers who come to or call the county office (i.e., providing information about FSA programs, answering questions about specific programs and/or loans, referring more difficult questions to the appropriate person).

- **Payments.** Issuing payments to or collecting payments from producers on a recurring and nonrecurring basis (e.g., issuing farm program payments and collecting farm loan payments) and making administrative payments (e.g., for telephone service, rent, office space, and equipment).

- **Managing paper flow.** Downloading and/or distributing procedures for administering farm programs and farm loan programs (e.g., notices, handbook amendments) and filing them in the appropriate handbook or notice books.

- **Managing farm and producer records.** Creating new and/or updating person and land-based records that include:

  - A review of how farm businesses are structured
  - Farmland usage records
  - Acreage reports
  - Data to use in determining how many persons are eligible for payment for a farming enterprise
  - Changes to producer information, such as phone numbers.

Brenda collects and prepares this information for the County Executive Director (CED) to present to the County Committee for review and decision making.

- **Administrative Support.** Maintaining time and attendance records for each employee and processing the payroll every 2 weeks

Possible performance elements to include in Brenda's performance plan are shown in the following table. In this example, several elements (i.e., customer service, communication, and execution of duties) are linked to mission results.

Example – Selecting Other Elements		
Element	**Definition**	**Rationale**
Customer Service	Routinely displays courteous and tactful behavior. Projects a positive and professional image of USDA. Provides advice that is timely, responsive and accurate. Maintains appropriate rapport with internal and external customers. Develops and establishes working relations with external organizations as required. Keeps supervisor and/or team leader informed of difficult and/or controversial issues and unique problems. Takes actions to effectively solve problems before they have an adverse impact on the organization or other employees.	A key aspect of Brenda's position. She greets and responds to questions/ requests from producers.
Communications	Oral and written communications are clear, correct, timely, and presented in an understandable manner. Supervisor and coworkers are informed of issues and problems when necessary. Information and guidance provided is timely and correct.	Another key aspect of the position. Brenda must greet producers in a prompt and courteous manner, communicate well, and respond to their requests and/or convey them to others. She must also prepare written reports for the CED.
Execution of Duties	Completed work assignments are performed in a timely manner, assuring a quality of work that meets the needs of the organization. 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, including timeframes.	Another key aspect of the position. Brenda issues payments, manages paper flow, manages farm and producer records, and provides administrative support.

Example – Selecting Other Elements		
Element	**Definition**	**Rationale**
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.	She must be a dependable and reliable member of the county office team.

DETERMINING CRITICAL AND NONCRITICAL ELEMENTS

When selecting performance elements, your supervisor must identify which elements will be critical and which will be noncritical.

- A critical element is an assignment or responsibility of such importance that unacceptable performance in that element would result in a determination that your overall performance is unacceptable. Critical elements:
  - Are the cornerstone of individual accountability in employee performance management. Since an employee may be demoted or removed for unacceptable performance in a critical element, these elements must describe work assignments and responsibilities that are within the employee's control.
  - Receive twice the weight of noncritical elements when the summary rating is being determined.
- Noncritical elements are those elements that are specific to the position but not necessarily critical to the goals of the work unit. At least one element must be noncritical.

Criteria for Selecting Critical Elements

There are several criteria that may indicate which additional elements might be critical, including the:

- Percentage of time spent performing the element. An element may be critical if a high percentage of time is spent working on it. However, a low percentage of time spent on an element is not a disqualifier if the importance or implications of not performing the element are serious.
- Impact on mission. An element may be critical if the success of the unit depends on your performing the element at the Fully Successful level.
- Consequence of error. An element may be critical if unacceptable performance would result in a serious negative outcome for an individual, the unit, or the Government.
- Legislative or regulatory requirements. An element may be critical if unacceptable performance would mean violation of a law or regulation.

Selecting Critical Elements - Examples

Example - Identifying Critical/Noncritical Elements

This table shows the critical and noncritical elements for Brenda Wade, a Program Technician (PT).

Element	Critical/Noncritical	Rationale
Customer Service	Critical	A key aspect of Brenda's position. She greets and responds to questions/requests from producers.
Communications	Critical	Another key aspect of the position. Brenda must greet producers in a prompt and courteous manner, communicate well, and respond to their requests and/or convey them to others. She must also prepare written reports for the CED.
Execution of Duties	Critical	Another key aspect of the position. Brenda issues payments, manages paper flow, manages farm and producer records, and provides administrative support.
Individual Contributions to the Team	Noncritical	She must be a dependable and reliable member of the county office team. This element is important but does not impact the unit's mission, and the consequences of error are less critical than for the other elements.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING	Answer the following questions. Refer to Appendix A for the correct answers.
Question 1	True or False? There are no mandatory elements for nonsupervisors.
Question 2	True or False? Only supervisors and managers are required to have an element showing linkage to agency mission and goals.
Question 3	True or False? For supervisors and managers as well as nonsupervisors, at least one element must be deemed noncritical.
Question 4	Each of the following are characteristics of critical elements EXCEPT: A. Not meeting a critical element warrants an Unacceptable rating. B. An employee may be demoted or removed for unacceptable performance in a critical element. C. Critical elements are weighted the same as noncritical elements when the summary rating is being determined

KEY POINTS

- Performance elements describe the actual work to be performed during the performance appraisal cycle. Each element describes a major and important requirement of the job on which you are rated for success.

- You should be involved in the development of your performance plan. Supervisors have the ultimate responsibility for the development of your performance plan, but your input should be considered and incorporated to the maximum extent possible.

- Employees in FSA have between three and five elements.

- Critical elements:

  – Are an assignment or responsibility of such importance that unacceptable performance in that element would result in a determination that your overall performance is unacceptable

  – Describe work assignments and responsibilities that are within your control

  – Receive twice the weight of noncritical elements when the summary rating is being determined.

TRANSITION

The next section, Measurable Standards, explains how the measures are written to quantify/qualify the existing performance elements.

Section 4: Measurable Standards

INTRODUCTION

Once the performance elements are selected, you and your supervisor must identify ways to measure whether the measurable standards have been achieved. Performance elements tell you what you have to do, and standards tell you how well you have to do it.

Under the five-level performance management system, the generic element description must be supplemented with job-specific measurable standards.

This section focuses on developing job-specific measurable standards to assess how well you are performing in an element.

WHAT IS A MEASURABLE STANDARD?

A measurable standard is a statement that quantifies or qualifies the desired result or behavior. It describes a level of performance in terms of results or behaviors expected of the employee by the supervisor or manager.

Measurable standards:

- Are the yardsticks used to measure results
- Include appropriate measures (e.g., quality, quantity)
- Express the performance that you must meet to be appraised at a particular level of performance
- Describe how well you are expected to perform
- Are clear expectations of what has to be done and how it has to be done.

MEASURABLE STANDARDS

Each performance element includes a generic description of the element, which typically refers to performance at the Fully Successful level. However, this description has no associated performance measures that describe what is required of your performance for a specific level.

- Measurable standards are not generic. Your supervisor, with your input, is responsible for developing job specific measurable standards at the Fully Successful level for each generic element. Developing measurable standards enables your supervisor to assess how you have performed your duties and responsibilities based on observable, measurable, and attainable criteria that describe performance at the various levels.

- Measurable standards, once created, are recorded for each element on Forms AD-435A and AD-435B

Effective measurable standards:

- Include quality, quantity, timeliness, and cost measures.

- Are credible (i.e., clear, specific, and understandable; reasonable and attainable; measurable, observable, or verifiable; and results oriented).

- Are written so that you can exceed them.

- Are appropriate to the level of your responsibility.

- Use number ranges instead of single numbers or percentages whenever possible for numeric measures.

- Are written at the Fully Successful level. These standards should reflect the required level of performance and expected results for the job that a fully experienced and competent employee will consistently achieve. However, your supervisor must be able to verbally describe the two other performance levels (i.e., Exceeds Fully Successful and Does Not Meet Fully Successful) when discussing your performance expectations.

Measurable Standards - Examples

The description for Communications is:

> Oral and written communications are clear, correct, timely, and presented in an understandable manner. Supervisor and coworkers are informed of issues and problems when necessary. Information and guidance provided is timely and correct.

However, this description does not fully describe what an employee's performance would look like at the Fully Successful level.

Example 1. To properly assess performance, you would want to identify if communications need to be "clear, correct, timely, and presented in an understandable manner" 85% to 95% of the time or if 75% to 84% is an appropriate measurable standards for Fully Successful. You might also want to identify whether your communications are predominantly oral or in writing and who relies on your communication for what purpose.

Example 2. If Fully Successful performance includes processing 8 to 10 loan applications a month, should processing 11 to 12 applications be rated as Exceeds Fully Successful? The supervisor must be able to explain Fully Successful and Exceeds Fully Successful performance so that you have a clear understanding.

WHY BOTHER WITH MEASURABLE STANDARDS?

To demonstrate the value of having measurable standards, answer each of the following questions.

Question	Yes	No
Do you know exactly what it takes to succeed in your job?		
Did you believe your last performance appraisal was fair and objective?		
Do you know where you stand and what you need to do to reach the next level of performance?		
Can you discuss performance with your supervisor without getting into personality traits or non-performance related issues? **Note:** OPM defines poor performance as the failure of an employee to do the job at an acceptable level. The acceptable level is usually, but not always, documented in written performance standards. OPM defines misconduct as the employee's failure to follow a workplace rule, whether written or unwritten.		
Do you and your supervisor have the same view regarding the quantity, quality, and priority of the work to be performed?		
Do you know how your supervisor will judge you?		
Do you know the difference between exceptional, mediocre, and poor performance?		

If you answered yes to several of these questions, congratulations. You probably have a good foundation on which to understand measurable standards and/or you have already taken the time to communicate with your supervisor about the measurable standards.

If you were not able to answer yes to these questions, then asking your supervisor questions about your measurable standards may help you understand performance expectations and assessment.

STEPS FOR DEVELOPING MEASURABLE STANDARDS

The steps that your supervisor must take to develop job-specific measurable standards are:

1. Identify the performance tasks within each element by identifying what "What must an employee do to achieve the levels of performance?"

2. Determine the types of measures needed to assess completion of the task (i.e., quality, quantity, timeliness, or cost effectiveness). There should be a balance in the types of measures used; for example, they should not all be focused on measuring quantity.

3. Determine how to evaluate the measurable standards (e.g., observations, production reports generated, work samples).

4. Write the measurable standards.

5. Discuss the measurable standards with you.

6. Record the measurable standards on the appropriate forms.

Required Measurable Standards Language for Nonsupervisors

In addition to writing measurable standards for selected elements, your supervisor must also be sure to include the mandatory language related Health and Safety. The mandatory language for Health and Safety is a measurable standard and can be added as a measurable standard for any appropriate element.

- **Health and Safety.** Demonstrates a basic understanding of the Agency's Safety and Health Program. Complies with safety and health rules and regulations that apply to all employees. Ensures all reports of unsafe and unhealthful conditions are reported to supervisor or designated official within 48 hours.

Regardless if the Nonsupervisory EEO/CR element is selected or if the descriptive language has been combined with another element, measurable standards must still be developed to address performance related EEO/CR.

For more information on how measurable standards are developed, refer to the Measurable Standards Job Aid in Appendix B.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer the following questions. Refer to Appendix A for the correct answers.

Question 1

Which of the following is NOT a characteristic of a measurable standard?

A. Includes quality, quantity, timeliness, and cost measures

B. Is appropriate to the level of your responsibility

C. Is generic to all similar positions

D. Is written so that your performance can exceed the expectation.

Question 2

True or False? Measurable standards are written at the fully successful level.

TRANSITION

In the next section, you will learn how to document your performance.

Section 5: Documenting Your Performance

INTRODUCTION

Your supervisor is responsible for many things, including assessing your performance. Because your supervisor's attention is drawn in many directions throughout the year, it is incumbent upon you to document your own successes and challenges. By doing this, you can engage in productive two-way feedback sessions with your supervisor and these sessions will be based on actual events, work products, and issues you have dealt with and/or where you need extra support. Because you know how your performance is being measured, you can document your performance accordingly.

In this section, you will learn effective strategies for documenting your performance. The following key topics are covered:

- Selecting documentation methods.
- Documentation methods.
- Why document?

SELECTING DOCUMENTATION METHODS

Select documentation methods that:

- Apply to each element and measurable standard. Plan to document all, not just some, elements and measurable standards.

- Reflect the measures selected. For example, if you have numeric measures in your performance plan, you will need to keep examples of your work that demonstrate the quantitative data related to your performance.

- Are realistic and practical, you feel comfortable with, and you will use.

  - Select documentation methods that you can follow. For example, if you have limited time each day to devote to documenting your efforts, planning on writing a daily log may not be realistic. However, creating a file where you can copy examples of your work may be less time consuming and thus more successful.

- If you already use a calendar to record appointments, it may require little time commitment to star those appointments that went well, or to note for the day what your success or challenge was.

- If you have space to keep a paper file, it may be worthwhile to keep one where you can drop any thank you notes, letters from customers, co-workers, or colleagues who are commending your efforts.

Remember, the only effective documentation strategy is the one that you can follow-through on. At year's end good intentions will not yield the information that you need to illustrate your performance to your supervisor.

Once you have decided on the strategies you think will work best for you, you are encouraged to share with your supervisor what you are planning to do. Your supervisor may have suggestions on particular items that you could track, or resources that are available to you that you may not be aware of.

Documentation Methods

Document your performance by:

- Keeping sample work products.

- Keeping supporting documents related to your work (e.g., log sheets, critical incident reports, project tracking files). Develop a tracking system as a means for tracking your productivity.

- Keeping examples of feedback from customers (e.g., customer surveys), coworkers, colleagues, or other managers.

- Demonstrating your performance to your supervisor, including asking that he or she evaluate the output and products of your work and being prepared when your supervisor conducts routine spot checks. Use your calendar to jot down instances in which you did something particularly well or when you noted and communicated to your supervisor a specific development need. This provides a quick and easy reference to help you recall specific instances of your performance.

- Giving your supervisor input regarding your performance (e.g., from routine one-on-one meetings with your supervisor). Make sure to share your successes and challenges frequently, not just during formal review discussions.

- Documenting feedback meetings with your supervisor (e.g., a summary of performance expectations and how the you are meeting them).

Why Document

As you learned earlier in Section 2, it is possible during the rating year to change a measurable standard if your supervisor determines that it is unrealistic as written. Your supervisor will be better prepared to make this decision if you have ongoing conversations around your progress towards meeting those goals and the external factors that are involved, and can document the impact of the external factors.

Documentation Challenges

You face some challenges when you document your performance:

- You must keep examples of different types of work throughout the year so that the examples illustrate the full spectrum of your work experience.

- If you had performance issues during the year, you should document how you addressed the problems, e.g., if you asked for help or if you used effective problem-solving skills.

- You should document each time you requested feedback from your supervisor, and what the outcome was. You should also document what development opportunities you sought and participated in during the year, and the outcomes of those efforts.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer the following questions. Refer to Appendix A for the correct answers.

Question 1

What are some effective methods of documenting your performance?

A. Keeping examples of your work

B. Filing thank you letters from customers

C. Telling your supervisor in informal conversations what your successes and challenges are

D. All of the above

E. None of the above

Question 2

Should you notify your supervisor of your development needs?

A. Yes, it's the best way to address potential issues while there is still time for you to take action.

B. No, you don't want to draw your supervisor's attention to your problems.

Question 3

Should you let your supervisor know that you are documenting your performance?

A. Yes, so that your supervisor can share input on whether you are documenting the right kind of information to best reflect your performance.

B. No, you don't want your supervisor to think you are questioning his or her ability to do their job.

KEY POINTS

- Your documentation processes should illustrate what is happening on the job, at what level you are performing consistently at various times in the year, what changes need to be made, and what steps are necessary to improve your performance.
- Establish folders to hold work samples and notes. Keep a copy of performance elements and measurable standards in the folder to remind you to collect information about each.
- Communicate with your supervisor about how you plan to document your performance. Elicit his or her input, ask for their ideas, and share yours.

TRANSITION

The next section, Evaluate Performance, explains how your supervisor will evaluate your performance and explain how ratings are assigned.

Section 6: Evaluate Performance

INTRODUCTION

The following two formal evaluation periods are required for all employees:

- A midyear progress review
- The year-end summary rating.

These are two times when your supervisor must evaluate your performance against the elements and measurable standards in your Performance Plan. Although your evaluation is mandatory during these two times, evaluation should be an ongoing process that takes place informally every day in the form of feedback from your supervisor.

When you and your supervisor focus on performance management as an ongoing, year-round process, your focus shifts from "justifying a rating" at the end of the year to continually improving your performance. Frequent feedback from your supervisor, customers and peers allows for correction of performance deficiencies before the summary appraisal is made.

STEPS FOR EVALUATING PERFORMANCE

There are four steps your supervisor follows when evaluating your performance:

1. Review documentation to compare and evaluate performance against expectations

2. Assign ratings for each element

3. Record accomplishments for elements rated Exceeds or Does Not Meet

4. Determine the summary rating level.

In this section, you will learn:

- How the ratings are assigned
- When your supervisor needs to write a narrative
- How the summary rating level is determined.

HOW RATINGS ARE ASSIGNED

One of the key pieces of information for supervisors to use when assigning ratings is objective documentation. Don't be afraid to submit documentation or work samples of your performance throughout the year for his or her consideration. After your supervisor has reviewed the appropriate documentation, the next step in evaluating performance is to assign a rating for each element.

Your supervisor's job is to examine your performance for the whole year, not to focus on isolated examples of good or bad performance. Again, this is another reason to keep documentation of your performance throughout the entire year.

With your year-round performance in mind, your supervisor will assign a rating (e.g., Exceeds, Fully Successful, or Does Not Meet) to each element that accurately reflects the comparison of the actual performance with the criteria and expectations detailed on the Performance Plan.

Element Ratings

There are three element rating levels:

- **Exceeds Fully Successful:** Your performance was significantly better in terms of quantity, quality, timeliness, and/or cost-effectiveness than one would normally expect from an individual assigned to the position (i.e., the performance exceeds the Fully Successful standard for the element being evaluated).

- **Fully Successful:** Your performance was as good as, but not necessarily better than, one would normally expect from an individual occupying the position (i.e., the performance meets the Fully Successful standard for the element being evaluated). This level generally describes the performance of the "average" effective employee whose work meets normal expectations in terms of quantity, quality, timeliness, and cost-effectiveness.

- **Does Not Meet Fully Successful:** Your performance has failed to fulfill the basic expectations for the work (i.e., the performance does not meet the Fully Successful standard for the element being evaluated).

If this is the case, you should document whether you have requested support or development to address your deficiencies. In order for a supervisor to assign this rating to your performance, they must prepare a written statement describing your deficiencies for all elements rated at this level (the supervisor may record this statement on either the AD-435A and/or AD-435B or on a separate sheet of paper).

NARRATIVES FOR ELEMENTS

For each element, your supervisor must prepare a written narrative. The narrative should:

- Include examples of performance where appropriate
- Be brief and specific
- Avoid adjectives and adverbs that are not objective.

HOW THE SUMMARY RATING LEVEL IS DETERMINED

All performance elements are not necessarily created equal: some are critical; some are noncritical. To recognize the difference, the supervisor will assign points: two points (usually referred to as appraisal units) for critical elements and one point (i.e., one appraisal unit) for noncritical elements.

For FSA field supervisors using EmpowHR, the fields will automatically populate. For supervisors not using EmpowHR, they will:

- Calculate the number of appraisal units for each employee to arrive at a total score and final rating

- Transfer the individual element ratings from the AD-435A or AD-435B to the final rating document, Form AD-435, Performance Appraisal

- Record either one or two points in the appropriate blocks (i.e., block 15B, 15C, or 15D) and add up the points (i.e., appraisal units) awarded at each level

- Translate this total score into the summary rating level for you.

Summary Rating Level

The number of appraisal units earned at each element rating level will determine your summary rating level. As its name implies, the summary rating level is an adjective summarizing your overall performance. The supervisor may use one of five rating levels, that are based on specific criteria:

- **Outstanding:** All elements were rated at the Exceeds level. For each element rating Outstanding, your supervisor must prepare a written narrative outlining your accomplishments.

- **Superior:** More elements were rated at the Exceeds level than at the Fully Successful level, and no elements were rated at the Does Not Meet level.

- **Fully Successful:** Elements rated at the Fully Successful level equal or surpass the number of elements rated at the Exceeds level, and no critical element was rated Does Not Meet; if one or more noncritical elements were rated at the Does Not Meet level, the elements rated at that level must have been offset by elements rated at the Exceeds level.

- **Marginal:** More elements were earned at the Does Not Meet level than at the Exceeds level, and no critical element was rated Does Not Meet.

- **Unacceptable:** One or more critical elements were rated at the Does Not Meet level. Should this occur, the supervisor must contact an employee relations specialist for guidance on how to proceed.

The supervisor will identify the summary rating level for each employee by checking the appropriate block on the AD-435.

Determine the Summary Rating Level - Practice

Practice - Determine the Summary Rating Level

The following table reflects Brenda's performance in the elements:

- Assign two points for critical elements and one point for noncritical elements. In this example, Individual Contributions to the Team is the noncritical element.
- Calculate the number of appraisal units to arrive at a total score and final rating.

When you are finished, refer to Appendix A for feedback.

Element	Rating
Customer Service	Exceeds
Communications	Exceeds
Execution of Duties	Exceeds
Individual Contributions to the Team	Fully Successful

Based on these results, what would be the summary rating?

A. Outstanding
B. Superior
C. Fully Successful
D. Marginal
E. Unacceptable

KEY POINTS

- To evaluate your performance your supervisor will compare your documented performance with performance criteria and job behaviors set forth in your elements and measurable standards.

- There are four steps for evaluating performance:

  1. Review documentation to compare and evaluate performance against expectations

  2. Assign ratings for each element

  3. Record accomplishments

  4. Determine the summary rating level.

TRANSITION

This completes the section on evaluation. You are now ready to complete section 7, Interpersonal Communication.

Section 7: Interpersonal Communication

INTRODUCTION

A key challenge for everyone in an organization is to effectively communicate our ideas, individually or in groups, and respond to the ideas of others in ways that create trust and support. Open and honest communication is the foundation of all interpersonal skills. As such, communication skills are critical to building trusting relationships both internal and external to the organization, creating customer satisfaction, working successfully in teams, and managing others. In terms of performance management, communication is the cornerstone of working effectively with your supervisor and building relationships with your supervisor and others in your work environment.

WHY COMMUNICATE?

Good communication skills not only enhance your personal relationships and your effectiveness as a team member, but they serve as important bedrock skills essential to future success in the organization.

In terms of performance management, communication is the key to understanding what you are being held accountable for, and to representing your issues and concerns. Effective communication enables you to receive the information you need in order to effectively manage your performance.

- Poor performance is costly in terms of personal stress, lost productivity, the impact on other employees who must pick up the workload of the nonperformer, lower morale, and the time requirements of the supervisor.

- If you communicate with your supervisor often, requesting feedback and input, you can work to avoid a situation where you are caught by surprise by a performance problem you may or may not be experiencing.

- Frequent feedback from your supervisor gives you the opportunity to correct performance deficiencies before you receive your summary appraisal.

SECTION TOPICS

This section will begin with a discussion about the communication process in general, and then focus on the barriers, challenges, and opportunities within the communication process. Each component will address not only general communication, but also how that specific component of the communication process may impact your experience within the performance management system.

Topics will include:

- Filters in the communication process
- Barriers to effective communication
- Skill of listening
- Reacting to messages in ways that build relationships
- How to give and receive feedback effectively.

GENERAL COMMUNICATION:

In order to successfully apply a communication model, you will first need to understand some basic principles of interpersonal communication.

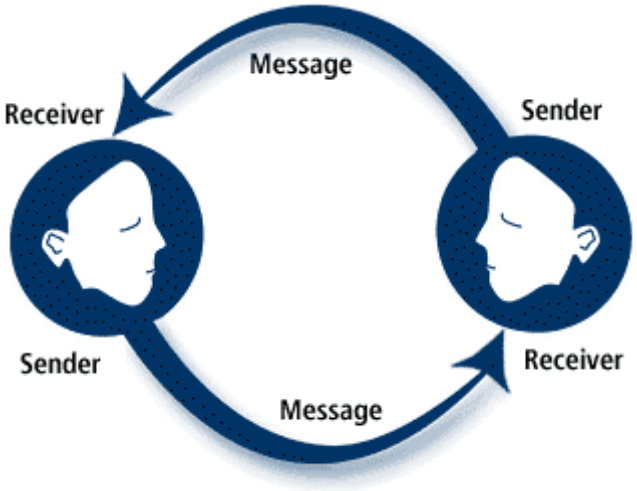
You may not think of communication as a process, but there are specific steps that occur during any communication between people.

This process involves:

- A Sender, who communicates information, thoughts, feelings, and needs to a receiver

- A Receiver, who gets the message from the sender and must interpret its meaning.

In most conversations, each person alternates between being a sender and a receiver. Usually, people communicate to create specific outcomes, share information, and/or provide feedback.



INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION: FILTERS

Receivers may not always grasp the meaning intended by the sender due to our individual filters. Filters are those things that get in the way of sending and receiving messages; they can complicate the communication process. Types of filters include:

- Life and work experiences, beliefs, and background (culture, heritage, and upbringing).
- Assumptions: the act of taking something for granted or supposing something without proof; an unwarrantable claim.
- Individual thinking styles, or how we take in and process information. For example, some people process visual images while others filter out the visual and process primarily auditory information.

The three parts of graphic on the next page show an example of a communication between a sender and receiver and the filters that impacted the interpretation.

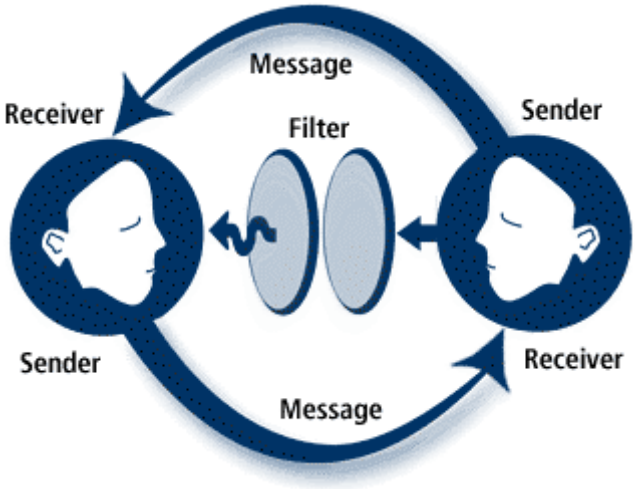
Once you become aware of your filters, you can take steps to suspend your assumptions or revisit your understanding of the meaning of the communication. To help validate that your interpretation of the meaning is accurate:

- Identify the assumptions underlying your conclusions and actions. Are they the correct assumptions? Where did these assumptions come from?

- Revisit perceptions by being open to another meaning or interpretation of the data you have observed and alter your views as appropriate.

- Reexamine the original data. Recognize that you might be wrong about some data or that you may have drawn an incorrect conclusion.

- Communicate with the sender to get more data, verify your understanding and perceptions, and confirm whether your assumptions are valid.



Sender Example

The speaker is a supervisor who is giving feedback to one of her employees. The supervisor is concerned because she received her employee's draft of a time-sensitive report 2 days late. She is also concerned because English is a second language for the employee and his grammar has been a problem. She also knows that he has been spending a lot of time working to improve his writing skills.

The supervisor says, "I know you've been working really hard lately. I've noticed the effort you've put into sharpening your writing skills. Most of your work is right on target, but in light of the difficulties you had meeting our last deadline, I'd like for us to take time today to talk about time management. . ."

Receiver Example

The receiver is foreign born, with English being a second language. He is very proud that he has learned English so quickly. Also, in his native country, time is not an absolute, and does not have the same importance as it does in the United States.

The employee heard and thought the following during the conversation:

The supervisor is blaming me for missing the deadline when she edited it so much and had me spend so much time rewriting nit-picking details. Handing in my draft a few days later doesn't make that much difference. Also, nice way to butter me up by saying my writing has improved.

Filters Example

In this script, filters could include:

- Difficulty with grammar when English is the second language.
- Assuming that the priority was to focus on improving writing, not making the deadline.
- The supervisor focusing on her discomfort with giving negative feedback, rather than on the employee.

In addition to the filters you have just learned about, there are some common barriers to the communication process. It is helpful for you to be aware of internal and external filters so that you can take action to reduce their potentially negative impact on your communication efforts.

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION: BARRIERS

There are basically two types of barriers: internal and external.

- **Internal** barriers are past experiences or knowledge through which we filter information. They come from inside us.
- Other barriers are **external**; they come from the environment.

Internal Barriers

Internal barriers may represent themselves in many forms. Below is a list of common sources of barriers.

- **Preconceived notions** about the situation or the other person constitute one internal barrier. For example, if you've already made your mind up that there's only one way to do something, your "preconceived notion" will interfere when someone verbalizes an alternative method.

  Or, if you have preconceived notions about people who wear "extreme" hair styles or "unusual" clothes, you may not listen as carefully to them as you would to other people. Preconceived notions are the basis of stereotyping. It's implicit in a statement such as "All guys with long hair are . . .," or even such a statement as "All Italians are . . .." When we think of stereotyping, we usually think of typing people by their ethnic backgrounds, gender, or physical characteristics.

- **Individual differences** can also create a barrier. People have different orientations—different ways of looking at things and different things that are important to them. In communication, these differences often clash. For example, when someone is giving you information, he or she may give you all the details involved when all you really want is the big picture, or vice versa. Or some people may be more naturally shy, while others may be more talkative.

- Another barrier is **preoccupation**. For example, you might be preoccupied with a work problem and not be "fully present" when someone brings up a good idea. Or, sometimes you might be so busy thinking about what you are going to say in rebuttal that you don't really hear what the other person is saying. In fact, studies have shown that most people listen for only 3 to 4 seconds before they begin to formulate their response.

- Another barrier is **status**. Status can be based on differences in organizational **level**, or it can be based on differences in **function** or **role**. The greater the difference between people's organizational levels, the more difficult communication can be.

External Barriers

Much like internal barriers, external barriers come from various sources. The difference is that external barriers are more often apparent to the sender and-or receiver whereas internal barriers can be subtler.

Common external barriers include:

- **Noise** that makes communicating difficult, such as phones ringing or multiple conversations
- **Temperatures** that are uncomfortably hot or cold
- **Distracting activities** going on nearby.

For more information about communication barriers, refer to the Interpersonal Communication job aid in Appendix B.

GIVE, GET, MERGE COMMUNICATION MODEL

Now that you understand the factors that contribute to the communication process, the filters that may impact your ability to understand meaning, and some common internal and external barriers, you are ready to learn about the Give, Get, Merge Communication Model – a strategy for effective interpersonal communication.

Many of us intuitively use the Give, Get, Merge Communication Model, particularly when we are discussing differing information, opinions, or experiences. It is an effective model for communicating not only with your supervisor, coworkers, and customers, but in our personal relationships as well.

Give

Give your perspective. Communicate a concise, specific, and objective message. Consider the needs of the individual when giving any message.

Get

Get the other person's perspective. Involve the other person in the discussion and listen to what he or she has to say. Ask for the person's opinions, ideas, and perspectives using open-ended questions. Listen carefully while suspending your judgment.

Merge

Merge perspectives. Reach a mutually acceptable agreement, taking into account the other person's perspective and needs. To merge perspectives, try to find common ground, identify specific differences, and explore alternatives.

In the context of performance management, most often you will be in the “Giving” and “Getting” roles of this communication model. Your supervisor will be giving you information about your performance, you will seek clarification and additional information, and either you or your supervisor will merge the ideas.

One common communication tool that is used to deliver messages is Feedback. Feedback is when one person delivers to another person a message about performance or behavior. In the performance management process supervisors often use feedback to give performance-based input to you. The next section goes into more detail about feedback in the performance management setting.

For more information about interpersonal communication and listening skills, refer to the Interpersonal Skills Job Aid in Appendix B.

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION: FEEDBACK

Communication through feedback is used in both formal and informal settings. Feedback is:

- An ongoing process between you and your supervisor in which information is exchanged concerning the performance expected and the performance exhibited
- A means of focusing on performance or issue rather than on the person
- A way to identify what to continue doing and what to stop doing, do less of, or start doing
- A gift; it is a reward for a job well done or an offer to help

Characteristics of Effective Feedback

Effective feedback meets four characteristics. It is:

- Descriptive
- Objective
- Timely
- Professionally delivered.

Types of Feedback

There are two types of feedback:

- Positive feedback is the acknowledgement of performance that meets or exceeds expectations. Receiving positive feedback increases the likelihood that the performance will continue and may boost confidence and motivation.

- Constructive feedback is an explanation of how performance did not meet expectations and provides steps that can be taken to correct or improve performance. If given effectively, constructive feedback maintains a person's self-esteem while helping him or her become more competent and confident.

Benefits of Constructive Feedback

Constructive feedback benefits you. It ultimately contributes to your ability to do your job and be evaluated fairly because it:

- Tells you what you did wrong

- Tells you what you need to do to improve

- Gives you the opportunity to stop avoiding or ignoring an issue

- Provides you with a process so that you do not overreact to the problem

- Helps minimize your defensiveness.

Constructive feedback is most effective when it is delivered soon after the problem was observed. Constructive feedback is given:

- On small, specific steps or subtasks
- To reinforce performance or behavior that has already been discussed
- When you see someone doing something incorrectly
- To help a person continue to improve in an area.

For more information on effective listening skills, refer to the Interpersonal Communications job aid in Appendix B.

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION: RESPONDING TO FEEDBACK - CRITICISM

This section addresses the situations when you are on the receiving end of constructive feedback and criticism. There are strategies for identifying and reacting to constructive feedback, and-or criticism.

Types of Criticism

There are three types of criticism:

- Destructive
- Vague
- Constructive.

Responding to Criticism

In the context of performance management, you will often be in the role of receiving feedback and sometimes criticism from your supervisor. Managing how you react to criticism is a critical skill in the communication process with your supervisor.

Criticism is a tool that can diminish you or empower you. It's up to you to decide how to use it. People typically mismanage criticism in two ways.

The first way they mismanage it is by becoming defensive.

- We make excuses about why we did what we did: "I couldn't help it."

- We "pass the buck": "That wasn't my fault. Amy didn't get the report to me on time."

- We deny that we had anything to do with the criticism: "I wasn't even there."

- We countercriticize: "Oh, like you've never been late for a meeting."

The second way people mismanage criticism is by using it as evidence that they're inadequate. They let it completely dismantle their positive self-image: "I'm so stupid, I should have known better."

Reacting to Destructive Criticism

You can tell that someone's criticism of you is destructive if it has no bearing on improving your performance or helping you grow as a person. There are several ways to defuse destructive criticism. You can:

- **Agree with a possible truth.** This is when you agree that the person may have a point. For example, a co-worker comes up to your desk and says, "This desk is a pig sty! How can you possibly work here?" You reply, "You're right. It probably wouldn't win an award for neatness." You've managed to defuse the criticism, and the person is likely to leave you alone at this point.

- **Selectively ignore.** This is when you choose to simply ignore the criticism. You don't ignore the person, only the critical statements made. As soon as the person has something constructive to say, you stop ignoring the statements.

- **Refocus the discussion.** This is when you redirect the discussion, steering away from the criticism and back to its original focus. For example, suppose you are in a meeting with your team to discuss roles for a specific project, and one of your team members says to you, "I can't believe you are not familiar with the customer requirements set up for this project." Rather than explaining that it's not your job to know those guidelines, you say, "Since Fred has been pulling together the customer requirements, perhaps he can explain."

- **Directly confront**. Here, you confront your criticizer by letting him or her know how you feel about being criticized. Be sure not to discuss the content of the criticism, but rather your lack of appreciation for the behavior. For example, suppose you are working on a report and a co-worker wants your help with something else. He or she says, "You're not finished yet? What's wrong with you?" You reply, "This has been a grueling day for me. What I need from you is your support, not your criticism."

Remember, the object of defusing destructive criticism is (1) to get the person to stop the behavior and (2) not to internalize it.

Reacting to Constructive Criticism

Finally, let's discuss reacting to constructive criticism. This can be the most difficult for an individual to deal with. When we make errors, or do something that negatively impacts another person, we are likely to be criticized for the behavior, even if it was unintentional.

There is only one strategy for dealing with constructive criticism: **accept responsibility**. In other words, don't become defensive; simply accept the criticism and learn from it.

This sounds a lot easier than it really is. It's human nature to protect our egos.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Each of the following statements is a form of criticism. Identify which category of criticism the statement fits best and consider a possible response you could use. Refer to Appendix A for the correct answers.

Question 1

Scenario: A supervisor has just asked an employee to take on another project that aligns with his or her performance plan. The employee says, "I like the idea of taking on the project; however, we'll need to talk about how to meet the other priorities I'm working on. Let's talk about other resources for them."

This statement is an example of which of the following types of criticism?

A. Constructive
B. Vague
C. Destructive

Question 2

Scenario: A supervisor has just given an employee feedback in an inappropriate tone. The employee says, "You're unprofessional."

This statement is an example of which of the following types of criticism?

A. Constructive
B. Vague
C. Destructive

What is a better way of phrasing the comment?

Question 3

Scenario: A supervisor has just provided an employee with input on how to accomplish a task, which is different from the process the employee thinks will work. The employee says, "That is a stupid idea!"

This statement is an example of which of the following types of criticism?

A. Constructive
B. Vague
C. Destructive

What is a better way of phrasing the comment?

REACTING TO CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM: HANDLING YOUR EMOTIONS

Regardless of the intent or delivery of the person giving you constructive feedback, you may respond emotionally. It is natural for you to do so. The harm is that emotional responses oftentimes work at cross purposes with your attempts at seeking clarity and better understanding from the person delivering information to you, and your emotional responses can negatively impact your interpersonal interactions with others.

Thus, it is important that you learn strategies for managing your emotional responses. You can keep your own emotions in check by:

- Being aware of and recognizing your signs of anger, annoyance, and frustration. Know your own "hot buttons" and recognize when others' behaviors are likely to trigger them.

- Learning how to take time out from a discussion if you need to cool off and get your emotions under control. Develop some techniques for skillfully ending a conversation if you feel yourself getting emotional.

- Reminding yourself why it is important to solve the problem, what your goal is, and what the consequences of not solving it might be.

- Not taking the individual's behavior personally. The behavior likely is not meant as an attack on or an affront to you.

- Reframing what you are experiencing. If you cannot change the way someone is reacting to the situation, then you might need to alter your perception of the experience. Reframing might mean changing a negative assumption about someone's behavior and transforming the interpretation into a positive one.

- Letting it go. Talk to a trusted ally and then drop the subject. Minimize the effects that challenging behaviors have on you.

- Reflecting about the situation. Spend structured time reflecting about what you did in a difficult situation, why you did it, and what you could do in a similar situation in the future.

This information is also summarized in the Words for Communicating Emotions and Tips For Managing Your Own Emotions job aids in Appendix B.

KEY POINTS

- Communication is the cornerstone to building successful relationships in the workplace and to your success within the performance management system.

- There are several aspects to communication that must be acknowledged: the roles people play, the filters and barriers that exist, and how to implement effective responses to information that is difficult to hear.

- There are two roles in communication: Sender and Receiver. These roles may shift during the communication interaction.

- Filters exist during all interpersonal interactions. Filters are those things that get in the way of sending and receiving messages. In addition to filters, there are two types of barriers that impact communication: Internal and External barriers.

- The Give-Get-Merge model illustrates effective strategies for giving, receiving, and consolidating information.

- Criticism is feedback that may be hard to hear and make it difficult for you to respond effectively. There are three types of criticism: Destructive, Vague, and Constructive and there are effective strategies for addressing each. Emotions are a natural side-effect to receiving criticism. There are strategies for managing your emotional response so that you can interact effectively with others.

TRANSITION

Congratulations! This is the last section in this document. Use this document as reference as needed and refer to the job aids for a summary of key information presented.

Appendix A: Exercise Feedback

Section 2: Performance Management Overview A-2

Section 3: Performance Elements A-3

Section 4: Measurable Standards A-4

Section 5: Documenting Your Performance A-5

Section 6: Evaluate Performance A-7

Section 7: Interpersonal Communication A-8

Section 2: Performance Management Overview

Page 2-5, Question 1

True or False? The focus of performance management is the year-end rating.

False. Although the performance management system sets checkpoints and tasks throughout the year, it does not preclude a supervisor's everyday role of managing their own work and their employees. Performance management is an ongoing, year-round process.

Page 2-6, Question 2

The focus of performance management is:

A. Justifying a rating at the end of the year.
B. Continually improving performance throughout the year.
C. Discussing how employees should be providing feedback to each other.
D. Increasing communication ratings in future surveys.

The correct answer is B. By focusing on performance management as an ongoing, year-round process, your supervisor's focus shifts from justifying a rating at the end of the year to continually improving your performance throughout the year.

Section 3: Performance Elements

Page 3-8, Question 1

True or False? There are no mandatory elements for nonsupervisors.

True. There are no mandatory elements for nonsupervisors.

Page 3-8, Question 2

True or False? Only supervisors and managers are required to have an element showing linkage to agency mission and goals.

False. All employees (supervisors and nonsupervisors) are required to have an element showing linkage to agency mission and goals.

Page 3-8, Question 3

True or False? For supervisors and managers as well as nonsupervisors, at least one element must be deemed noncritical.

True. All employees (supervisors and nonsupervisors) must have at least one element classified as noncritical.

Page 3-8, Question 4

Each of the following are characteristics of critical elements EXCEPT:

A. Not meeting a critical element warrants an Unacceptable rating.
B. An employee may be demoted or removed for unacceptable performance in a critical element.
C. Critical elements are weighted the same as noncritical elements when the summary rating is being determined.

The correct answer is C. Critical elements are the key duties and responsibilities of the position and form the primary reasons for the position's existence. If an employee does not meet a critical element, he or she will receive an unacceptable rating. An employee may be demoted or removed for unacceptable performance in a critical element. Critical elements receive twice the weight of noncritical elements when the summary rating is being determined.

Section 4: Measurable Standards

Page 4-6, Question 1

Which of the following is NOT a characteristic of a measurable standard?

A. Includes quality, quantity, timeliness, and cost measures
B. Is appropriate to the level of your responsibility
C. Is generic to all similar positions
D. Is written so that your performance can exceed the expectation.

The correct answer is C. Measurable standards, while they must be comparable for employees in similar positions, must also be tailored to meet the specific requirements of each person's job. For example, many PT's in the same office have the same job title, but have different program responsibilities so it may be appropriate for them to have different measurable standards.

Page 4-7, Question 2

True or False? Measurable standards are written at the Fully Successful level.

The correct answer is True. Measurable standards are written at the fully successful level. Good measurable standards are written so that the employee knows what exceeding and underperforming would look like.

Section 5: Documenting Your Performance

Page 5-4, Question 1

What are some effective methods of documenting your performance?

A. Keeping examples of your work
B. Filing thank you letters from customers
C. Telling your supervisor in informal conversations what your successes and challenges are
D. All of the above
E. None of the above

The correct answer is D. The most effective method of documenting your own performance is whatever method you can follow through on. The methods you choose to demonstrate your success in meeting your measurable standards must be realistic for you to keep up with in order for you to have a complete file at the mid-point and end of the year. Whether you keep paper and-or electronic copies of your work; file thank you notes from customers, supervisors or colleagues; note times when you have interacted with your supervisor (e.g., when you have asked for help with an issue or requested specific training linked to your performance); or use your informal conversations with your supervisor as an opportunity to update him or her on your recent successes and challenges – as long as you take action consistently throughout the year to keep track of your performance, when you have the mid-year and end-of-year performance review discussion with your supervisor, you will be well-prepared.

Page 5-4, Question 2

Should you notify your supervisor of your development needs?

A. Yes, it's the best way to address potential issues while there is still time for you to take action
B. No, you don't want to draw your supervisor's attention to your problems

The correct answer is A. It is a good idea for you to notify your supervisor when you have identified a professional development need related to meeting the requirements of your current position. Addressing your own development is still a personal responsibility as your supervisor may not have the resources to allocate for training or time-off for you to attend a learning experience. However, if you take the initiative to address your development needs (e.g., re-reading the handbooks and notices, observing colleagues, looking for publications that provide information you need) make sure that it is reflected in your improved performance and that you share with your supervisor the strategy that you used.

Page 5-4, Question 3

Should you let your supervisor know that you are documenting your performance?

A. Yes, so that your supervisor can share input on whether you are documenting the right kind of information to best reflect your performance

B. No, you don't want your supervisor to think you're questioning their ability to do his or her job.

The correct answer is A. Open communication is the foundation of an effective relationship. Clear understanding by you of what your supervisor will be monitoring will not only help you address your performance concerns, but will also save you time by making sure that you are documenting the right kinds of examples. If, for example, your supervisor is looking for the number of correct payments you filed for a given program, and you spent the year keeping examples related to the speed in which you processed payments, at year's end you will not have the right kind of documentation to illustrate your performance in terms that your supervisor is looking for.

Section 6: Evaluate Performance

Pages 6-5, Determining Summary Rating Level

Element	Rating
Customer Service	Exceeds
Communications	Exceeds
Execution of Duties	Exceeds
Individual Contributions to the Team	Fully Successful

Based on these results, what would be the summary rating?

A. Outstanding
B. Superior
C. Fully Successful
D. Marginal
E. Unacceptable

The correct answer is B. Brenda's summary rating would be Superior because she earned more appraisal units at the Exceeds level than at the Fully Successful level and no appraisal units at the Does Not Meet level.

Section 7: Interpersonal Skills

Pages 7-13, Question 1

Scenario: A supervisor has just asked an employee to take on another project that aligns with his or her performance plan. The employee says, "I like the idea of taking on the project; however, we'll need to talk about how to meet the other priorities I'm working on. Let's talk about other resources for them."

This statement is an example of which of the following types of criticism?

A. Constructive
B. Vague
C. Destructive

The correct answer is A, Constructive.

Pages 7-13, Question 2

Scenario: A supervisor has just given an employee feedback in an inappropriate tone. The employee says, "You're unprofessional."

This statement is an example of which of the following types of criticism?

A. Constructive
B. Vague
C. Destructive

What is a better way of phrasing the comment?

The correct answer is B, Vague.

Possible Alternative: "I understand that you are [insert focus of feedback], but I don't appreciate the tone you have used.

Pages 7-13, Question 3

Scenario: A supervisor has just provided an employee with input on how to accomplish a task, which is different from the process the employee thinks will work. The employee says, "That is a stupid idea!"

This statement is an example of which of the following types of criticism?

A. Constructive
B. Vague
C. Destructive

What is a better way of phrasing the comment?

The correct answer is C, Destructive.

Possible Alternative: "Why do you think that idea will work more effectively than [insert original idea]?

Appendix B: Job Aids

Q12 Impact Engagement Interview B-2

Tips for Writing Performance Elements and Measurable Standards..... B-10

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Q12 Impact Engagement Interview

Q12® IMPACT
ENGAGEMENT INTERVIEW

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ENGAGEMENT INTERVIEW:
Q01. KNOW WHAT'S EXPECTED

QUESTIONS TO ASK	NOTES
1 What have been your main successes at work over the last 6 months?	
2 What do you think will be your successes over the next 6 months?	
3 How will these successes contribute to the overall organization?	
4 How can I help you achieve these successes?	

THINGS TO REFLECT UPON

How clear is this person about what has been achieved and what is going to be achieved?

Are his or her expectations realistic?

Are his or her expectations in line with what you expect as the manager?

Is this person clear about the difference his or her work makes to the organization?

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ENGAGEMENT INTERVIEW:
Q02. HAVE MATERIALS & EQUIPMENT

QUESTIONS TO ASK	NOTES
1 Thinking about the work you do, is there anything you need that would help you do your work better?	
2 How would this help?	
3 How much difference would it make?	
4 How could we measure this difference?	

THINGS TO REFLECT UPON

Are there obvious issues that seem to get in the way of this person doing their work better?

Is he or she clear about how improvements in materials and equipment will drive outcomes?

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Engagement Interview:
Q03. Opportunity to do best

Questions to ask	Notes
1 What do you really like about your work?	
2 What aspects of your work do you think you do really well?	
3 Are there things you are expected to do at work that you don't like or find difficult?	
4 How can I help you with these?	

Things to reflect upon

How close a fit is this person for this role?

Does he or she excel in critical areas where you need him or her to make a difference?

What "blind spots" does this person have?

How can you help adjust this person's role to better suit him or her?

3

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Engagement Interview:
Q04. Recognition

Questions to ask	Notes
1 When you achieve success at work, how do you like to be recognized?	
2 Whom do you want to know about your achievements?	
3 As you look ahead to the next 12 months, what recognition would you like to achieve?	
4 How can I help you achieve that recognition?	

Things to reflect upon

What kinds of recognition might work best for this person?

How could you plan to ensure this person is recognized for what he or she does?

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Engagement Interview:
Q05. Cares about me

Questions to ask	Notes
1 Do you have any strong partnerships at work?	
2 Are there some people who seem to bring out the best in you?	
3 Are there some people whom you tutor or mentor?	
4 How do you like to be supported in your work?	
5 Will I need to ask or will you always tell?	

Things to reflect upon

Does this person need others in order to be successful?

How close will this person get to others at work?

What active mentoring relationships is this person engaged in?

How can you extend the opportunities for this person to connect better with others?

How closely and how regularly should you connect with this person?

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ENGAGEMENT INTERVIEW:
Q06. DEVELOPMENT

QUESTIONS TO ASK	NOTES
1 How often should you and I meet to discuss your progress?	
2 What areas of your work would you like to improve?	
3 What's the best way for you to learn these things?	
4 In what areas of work do you think you could make the greatest contribution?	

THINGS TO REFLECT UPON

What are this person's learning needs?

How realistically do these needs align with the needs of the organization?

How could you help this person satisfy these needs?

What opportunities exist to give this person more responsibility?

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Q12® Impact
Engagement Interview

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Tips for Writing Performance Elements and Measurable Standards Job Aid

Converting Expected Accomplishments Into Performance Elements

Once the performance elements have been identified for a position, the next step is to write them. The initial structure of a written performance element is straight-forward: It should consist of an action verb and an object. For example:

Action Verb	**Object**
Types	letters and memoranda
Submits	weekly reports
Trains	subordinates
Audits	travel vouchers

While there is no one right way to do this, the following examples will be helpful. Examples 1-3 below reflect properly stated performance elements. Examples 4 and 5, on the other hand, are poorly stated elements. They contain language that describes standards, a mixture of element and standard, or statements identifying attributes, abilities, behaviors, etc.

Examples of proper performance elements:

- Example 1. Tracks, monitors, and prepares, analytical information for reports. Organizes monthly "XYZ" meeting and coordinates agenda and discussion items with attendees. Monitors/analyzes the status of Quality Performance Measurement (QPMs)/Quality Performance Indicators (QPIs).
- Example 2. Initiates, processes, and completes Deficiency Reports (DRs) and/or Technical Coordination Group (TCG) projects for assigned systems/equipment.
- Example 3. Examines and computes all types of settlements. Determines authorized entitlements to the individual traveler.

Examples of poor performance elements:

- Example 4. Prepares proposal development worksheets, work breakdown structure and dictionary, proposal outline and mockup, compliance checklists and compliance matrix. Data is accurate and provided within established times. Provides a positive influence to team members and readily adapts to new situations or changing work environment.

  In this example the first sentence does describe **what work** is done and ending the element at this point would make it proper. However, by adding the second and third sentence, this element becomes distorted and confusing. The second sentence of this element is a statement of **how well** the work is to be accomplished and is therefore language describing a standard. Again, the last sentence does not describe **what work** is to be done.

- Example 5. Complies with security, safety, and good housekeeping practices.

  This example uses the phrase "Complies with" which indicates **how well** something is being performed or accomplished; therefore, this statement contains language that actually makes it a standard.

Tips for Writing Performance Elements and Measurable Standards (continued)

Checklist for Writing Performance Elements		
By completing the checklist below, you and your supervisor can judge whether the performance elements that have been written for your job are the most appropriate.		
Is performance/execution of this element necessary for mission accomplishment?	Yes	No
Does the element establish an "end product" or outcome that will be the consequence of performing it?	Yes	No
Is there a negative consequence to the organization's mission if performed inadequately or if the "end product" were not produced?	Yes	No
Is it reflected in the employee's position description?	Yes	No
Is this a significant component of the position?	Yes	No
Is the "end product" central to the purpose of the position?	Yes	No
Is the element a regular or recurring requirement of the position?	Yes	No
Does employee have full authority to perform this element?	Yes	No
Is it distinguishable from other performance elements?	Yes	No
Does the element describe generalized personality traits? (If so, it cannot be used)	Yes	No

Tips for Writing Performance Elements and Measurable Standards (continued)

Once the Performance Elements have been selected and/or written, it is important to write good measurable standards that illustrate that you are performing your job to the fully successful level. A good measurable standard is specific, objective, mission-related, nondiscriminatory, observable and results-focused. These criteria are described in greater detail below:

A Good Measurable Standard Is . . .

- **Specific and objective**. The measurable standard should be clearly written, be free from ambiguities/bias/personal feelings or opinions, and contain finite measures that specify the line between satisfactory work and less-than-satisfactory work. A measurable standard should also allow room for an employee to exceed the satisfactory level. Additionally, whenever possible, use ranges when setting numeric measures.
- **Mission related**. The measurable standard should directly link the required performance of the job.
  Nondiscriminatory. The measurable standard should be able to be consistently applied to all personnel in the same or similar position or grade with the same authority. Although the standards may be the same for similar positions, the measures should reflect the grade level of the employee.
- **Observable**. You must be realistically able to observe and monitor the performance to ascertain whether the measurable standard has been met. Those observations should be based on measurable outcomes in terms of quality, quantity, timeliness, and/or cost-effectiveness.
- **Written to the Fully Successful level**. Measurable standards should reflect the required level of performance and expected results for the job. A fully experienced and competent employee will consistently achieve or meet the standards for the job given circumstances within his or her control.

Types of Measurable Standards . . .

- **Qualitative measures** refer to the accuracy, appearance, or usefulness of the work effort. For example, typical quality measures may focus on the number of errors allowable on customer satisfaction surveys.
- **Quantitative measures** refer to the number of products produced, services provided, or a general result. They are expressed in terms of numbers, percentages, frequencies, etc.
- **Timeliness measures** refer to completion times and are usually expressed as how quickly, when, or by what date an employee produces the work.
- **Cost-effectiveness measures** refer to dollar savings or cost control for the Government that can be documented and measured in agency annual fiscal year budgets. Cost-effectiveness measures may include maintaining or reducing unit costs, reducing the time it takes to produce or provide a product or service, or reducing waste.

Tips for Writing Performance Elements and Measurable Standards (continued)

Tips for Developing Measurable Standards . . .
To determine the type(s) of measure(s) that might be appropriate for each task, think about the following questions. • Is quality important? Does the stakeholder or customer care how well the work is done? • Is quantity important? Does the stakeholder or customer care how many items are produced? • Is it important to accomplish the element by a certain time or date? • Is it important to accomplish the element within certain cost limits? • What measures are already available?
Tips for Evaluating the Measurable Standards . . .
Evaluate the tasks using a combination of descriptive and numeric measurements. **Numeric measurable standards** are easy to verify and provide a quantifiable, objective tool. **Descriptive measurable standards** have three components: a judge, what the judge looks for, and a verifiable description of what would represent meeting expectations. Think about the following questions evaluate the measurable standards for each task: • How could quality, quantity, timeliness, and/or cost-effectiveness be evaluated? • Is there some number or percent that could be tracked? If the task does not lend itself to being evaluated with numbers but can only be described, ask: • Who could judge that the expectations of element were met? • What factors would they look for?

Menu of Recommended Elements

Execution of Duties. Completed work assignments are performed in a timely manner, assuring a quality of work that meets the needs of the organization. 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, including timeframes.

Communications. Oral and written communications are clear, correct, timely, and presented in an understandable manner. Supervisor and coworkers are informed of issues and problems when necessary. Information and guidance provided is timely and correct.

Supervision (Mandatory for all supervisors and managers). Work is assigned in a fair and effective manner. Technical guidance to subordinate staff is given in a timely manner. Performance management is implemented in accordance with procedures. 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.

The required measurable standards under this element are:

- Has an employee performance plan that focus on results achieved, contain at least one element that is aligned with organizational goals, and are in place within 30 calendar days of the beginning of the appraisal period. Mid year reviews are conducted timely and according to Agency guidelines. Ratings are accurate and issued within 30 calendar days of the end of the appraisal period.

- Adheres to Safety and Occupational Health practices and procedures in order to promote and maintain a safe and healthful work environment for all employees. Upon report of unsafe/unhealthful condition, notifies appropriate office within 48 hours, and follows up and/or takes appropriate action until condition is resolved.

Team Leadership. Routinely leads individuals and team members toward specific goals and accomplishments. Provides encouragement, guidance, and directions as needed. Adjusts style to fit situation. Delegates appropriate authority in an effective manner. Coordinates functions of the team members. Demonstrates a sincere interest in employees' activities, abilities, etc.

Program Management. Manages program(s), resolving issues and problems within the employee's control. Monitors all aspects of program(s) for quality, effectiveness, and consistency. Program plans and guidance are responsive to objectives and requirements of the Agency. Policy instructions are appropriately issued and are accurate. Evaluates effectiveness of work and adjusts plans accordingly.

Menu of Recommended Elements (continued)

Special Projects. Special projects are regularly completed on time in a competent, accurate, and thorough manner. Completed projects comply with regulations and procedures. Special projects are completed independently, or reflect research and collaborations with others as required.

Research and Analysis. Thoroughly and accurately researches issues in a timely manner, using available reference sources (e.g., USDA manuals, or applicable law or regulations.) Makes reasonable recommendations or decisions based on available guidance.

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

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.

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.

Supervisory Equal Employment Opportunity and Civil Rights. (Mandatory for all supervisors and managers). Performs all duties in a manner which consistently demonstrates fairness, cooperation, and respect towards coworkers, office visitors, and all others in the performance of official business. Demonstrates awareness of EO/OCR policies and responsibilities of Agency and Departmental goals of working to employ and develop a diverse, yet unified workforce.

Nonsupervisory Equal Employment Opportunity and Civil Rights. Performs all duties in a manner which consistently demonstrates fairness, cooperation, and respect towards coworkers, office visitors, and all others in the performance of official business. Demonstrates awareness of EO/OCR policies and responsibilities of Agency and Departmental goals of working to employ and develop a diverse, yet unified workforce.

****The element can be standalone or the language must be included with another element.***

Required Language in Measurable Standards for NONSUPERVISORS

Nonsupervisors must have mandatory language related to Health and Safety as part of their measurable standards under any selected element.

- **Health and Safety.** Demonstrates a basic understanding of the Agency's Safety and Health Program. Complies with safety and health rules and regulations that apply to all employees. Ensures all reports of unsafe and unhealthful conditions are reported to supervisor or designated official within 48 hours.

Nonsupervisors must have language related to EEO/Civil Rights included in their elements. The Nonsupervisory EEO/Civil Rights element may be selected or the descriptive language from that element may be combined with the descriptive language of another element. Refer to the Menu of Elements in Appendix B for more information. Regardless if the Nonsupervisory EEO/CR element is selected or if the descriptive language has been combined with another element, measurable standards must still be developed to address performance related EEO/CR.

Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions

Communication: All

*(S) identifies objectives as supervisor only.

Communicates clearly with producers and shares accurate information 90% of the time.

Responds to general program questions within 24 hours with no more than 6-8 exceptions. Elevates more complex questions to supervisor, team leader, or other individual responsible within 2 hours of inquiry.

Schedules staff meetings on a regular basis (at least monthly and after major program conferences and meetings or more often if required by management). (S)

Prepares written documents that are clear, concise, and understandable as well as following prescribed procedures and within established timeframes with no more than 3 exceptions.

Responds in writing (when appropriate) to customer inquiries within established timeframes with no more than 3 exceptions.

Regularly shares program information for which one is responsible with co-workers to increase staff awareness of all program areas within timeframes established by management (cross-training, collaboration, reports at staff meetings, etc.) 90% of the time.

Resolves disputes and problems with others through use of problem solving, conflict resolution, and negotiation.

***Supervisors must include established timeframes, dates, numbers, and percentages where required.**

Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions (continued)

Customer Service: All

Responds to customer questions accurately, according to procedures with no more than 6-8 valid complaints. Responds, by at least acknowledging receipt of an inquiry as soon as possible, but within 24 hours 90% of the time.

Provides internal training that is accurate and given within established timeframes 90% of the time.

Completes assigned program training within established timeframes 90% of the time.

Ensures external customers are acknowledged within 3 minutes of the time they enter the office with no more than 10 exceptions.

Uses a customer transaction checklist to ensure all required information is obtained and applications are completed and accurate with no more than 5 exceptions.

Provides program benefits information to producers and other customers; e.g. newsletters, counter information, producer meetings, producer organizations, newspaper articles, radio announcements within established timeframes with no more than 3 exceptions.

Ensures that customer applications are accurate and processed within established timeframes with no more than 1-3 exceptions.

Ensures that payments are processed within timeframes with no more than 1-3 exceptions.

Responds to other agencies (NRCS, RMS, Conservation Districts, Extension Services, etc.) regarding shared programs within established timeframes with no more than 1-5 exceptions.

Makes improvement on customer satisfaction measures compared to previous data[1] (comment/feedback cards, customer survey, random customer calls, direct observations, etc.).

Receives no more than 6-8 of valid customer complaints.

***Supervisors must include established timeframes, dates, numbers, and percentages where required.**

[1] In order for this performance objective to be meaningful, a valid customer service measure must be in place.

Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions (continued)

Execution of Duties: Nonsupervisors

Prepares reports [insert examples] that are accurate and completed within established timeframes with no more than 1-3 exceptions.

Achieves utilization of the EFT for 90% of loan obligations.

Achieves utilization of the EFT for 95% of payments.

In accordance with FSA policy, deposits and processes payments within 24 hours of receipt.

Achieves or demonstrates progress toward ensuring that no improper payments are issued.

Achieves or demonstrates progress towards working to provide information about program benefits to producers to ensure that they can make an informed decision [insert outcome measures here] e.g., newsletters, counter information, producer meetings, meeting with producer organizations, etc.

Achieves or make progress towards ensuring payment amounts are accurate.

Ensures applications are completed accurately 97% of the time in order to minimize inaccurate payments.

Completes all actions required on an application within established timeframes or goals 95% of the time.

Achieves or make progress toward ensuring farm loan transactions or other assigned work is accurate and complete.

Loads software within two days of receipt 95% of the time.

Achieves or makes progress towards delinquency rates within the states' established goals.

Ensures that operations occur in an efficient manner to support the program areas (e.g., printing and distributing materials, creating regulations and guidance, etc.) with no more than 3 exceptions.

Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions (continued)

Execution of Duties: Nonsupervisors (continued)

Contracting: Meets Federal contracting regulations with respect to processing, follow through, and life span with no more than 3 exceptions.

Processes requests in a timely manner (purchasing agents) 90% of the time.

Files notices and amendments within two days of posted receipt.

Demonstrates a basic understanding of the Agency's Safety and Health Program. Complies with safety and health rules and regulations that apply to all employees. Ensures all reports of unsafe and unhealthful conditions are reported to supervisor or designated official within 48 hours.

***Supervisors must include established timeframes, dates, numbers, and percentages where required.**

Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions (continued)

Individual Contributions to the Team: All Except Team Leaders and Supervisors

Demonstrates collaborative efforts between Farm Programs and Farm Loan Programs by regularly sharing information and providing other support. Attends and participates in joint staff meetings with no more than 2 exceptions.

Regularly cooperates with coworkers and others in meeting commitments and accomplishing assigned work on time; i.e., sharing information freely.

Responds constructively to feedback, seeking ways to improve.

Consistently raises concerns in constructive manner and offers potential solutions.

Fosters productive and cooperative working relationships by showing understanding, courtesy, tact, and politeness to others with no more than 6-8 valid complaints.

Updates records that affect other programs in the office within timeframes established by management.

***Supervisors must include established timeframes, dates, numbers, and percentages where required.**

Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions (continued)

Research and Analysis: All

Reviews and analyzes temporary directive notices and procedure notices on a daily basis 95% of the time.

Takes actions required by directives within the timeframes required 97% of the time.

Asks questions for clarification and makes suggestions for implementation within the timeframes established by management.

Writes state procedural notices required by the supervisor that are clear, concise, and understandable within established timeframes 95% of the time. [Applies to State Office]

Conducts research and data gathering in response to legal issues and other assignments that are complete, accurate, and relevant within established timeframes 95% of the time.

Assembles, indexes, and organizes work papers to expedite analysis and develop quality summaries and report segments with no more than 3 of revisions by supervisor 90% of the time.

Analyzes data to identify weaknesses, patterns, and trends that are communicated to supervisor and other required staff within established timeframes.

Prepares case files that are complete and accurate within established timeframes for use in legal or administrative forums with no more than 3 exceptions.

Prepares case files for program appeals that are complete and accurate within established timeframes 95% of the time.

***Supervisors must include established timeframes, dates, numbers, and percentages where required.**

Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions (continued)

Resource Management: All

Manages within established budget for program, function, or work assigned; notifies appropriate individual of potential budget shortfalls at least 60 days in advance.

Ensures that budget object codes are correctly entered 97% of the time.

Ensures that travel, training, and other administrative forms are properly completed, timely, and followed-up to ensure proper processing 97% of the time.

Plans resource needs accurately 97% of the time.

Ensures bills are paid accurately so that payments are not deemed to be improper.

Plans projects or other assignments, monitors, and completes within schedule and quality goals 95% of the time.

***Supervisors must include established timeframes, dates, numbers, and percentages where required.**

Measurable Standards for FSA Field Office Positions (continued)

Team Leadership: All

Provides leadership or oversees subordinate or co-workers' work and achieves desired results 90% of the time.

Plans projects, monitors or reviews work within schedule and quality goals for assigned program or functional work 90% of the time.

Identifies and pursues opportunities to improve services or products.

Demonstrates collaborative efforts between Farm Programs and Farm Loan Programs by ensuring team regularly shares information and provides other support. Joint staff meetings will be held on a regular basis as established by management, frequency of the meetings must be established in writing.

***Supervisors must include established timeframes, dates, numbers, and percentages where required.**

Documenting Your Performance Job Aid

Monitoring Methods

There are many ways to document your performance, but the most frequently used is keeping copies of your work and examples of compliments and positive impact on the organization. Other methods you can use include gathering information by:

- Asking for and reviewing customer feedback ☐
- Seeking feedback from coworkers, peers ☐

What to Collect

To keep work examples that collectively are not biased in either a high or low direction for the entire review period, determine if you are collecting . . .

- A representative sample (you won't keep everything) of your overall work? ☐
- Information on both typically slow and busy days? ☐
- Data for important projects and for routine ones? ☐
- Examples of work at all times of the day? ☐
- Information representing all of the your elements and standards? ☐
- Input from your supervisor during formal and informal feedback sessions? ☐

Interpersonal Communication Job Aid

Understanding Communication: Personality	In the two-way communication process, you are both sender and receiver. Communication is not as straightforward as it might seem. Internal and external barriers often interfere with the effective communication of information. Individual differences are a major barrier to communication. In order to communicate effectively, it is important to understand our own personality style and the styles of others. It is also important to consider flexing our style when necessary to communicate better.
The Communication Process: Ways we communicate	As senders and receivers, we communicate in a number of ways. • Words are used to express thoughts, ideas, and directions. • Tone of voice, pacing, and volume emphasize or change the meaning of the message. • Nonverbal cues such as body language, eye contact, and posturing reinforce or negate the words of the message. • Choices about clothing and grooming alter or reinforce the message as much as choice of words.
Communication Barriers	Some barriers come from the way we communicate. • **Words**. Colloquialisms, regional expressions/pronunciations, acronyms, and lingo all affect communication. For example, a "hog" can mean an animal, a motorcycle, or a Cadillac. • **Nonverbal cues**. Body language, posture, actions, and gestures can send mixed messages or convey a different message than you intend. For example, a furrowed brow can be a sign of concern, anger, or frustration. • **Tone of voice, pacing, and volume**. Your tone of voice, pacing, and volume can interfere with the communication process. For example, monotones and shrill tones can cause the receiver to "tune out" what is being said. A fast pace can confuse the receiver and a slow pace can cause boredom.

Interpersonal Communication Job Aid (continued)

Communication: Internal Barriers	There are also barriers that come from inside the sender or the receiver. • **Preconceived notions/stereotyping.** Preconceived notions are expectations we have of others because of their job roles, gender, ethnic background, etc. These expectations are similar to stereotyping. Stereotyping is implicit in statements such as, "All teenagers are . . ." • **Self-concept.** If you think you are good at communicating, it may be hard for you to hear messages to the contrary. On the other hand, if you are insecure, you may be overly sensitive to criticism. • **Emotion.** When you are angry, you distort communication to get more ammunition for your point of view. • **Individual differences.** Certain personality styles determine how we act in a situation. Since no two people are exactly alike, their differences can lead to miscommunication.

Interpersonal Communication: Listening Skills

Three effective listening skills are **Attending**, **Paraphrasing**, and **Active Listening**.

Attending	Attending behaviors are the things you do to communicate that you care and are paying attention to what the person is saying. These include physical behaviors such as: • Eye contact • Nodding • Posture. Attending also includes verbal behaviors such as: • Saying "uh huh" • Voice tone • Asking facilitative questions.
Facilitative Questions	Facilitative questions are open questions. Open questions: • Require more than a "yes" or "no" answer • Elicit discussion • Usually begin with "What," "How," "When," or "Why." Some examples of open facilitative questions are: • What do you think of that? • How would you approach this? • Why do you think it's happening? • What are your ideas for solving the problem? • What would happen if we try this?
Paraphrasing	Paraphrasing involves rephrasing in your own words what someone is saying. The purposes of paraphrasing are to: • Help the other person feel listened to • Encourage the person to expand on what he or she is saying • Let you check your understanding before you react to what was said. There are five criteria for paraphrasing. Your response should: • Be interchangeable (not adding to or subtracting from what was said) • Be brief • Be original, in your own words • Convey neither approval nor disapproval • Begin with the pronoun "You."

Interpersonal Communication: Listening Skills (continued)

Paraphrasing (continued)	There are four steps to effective paraphrasing: 1. Listen to the details of what is being said. 2. Mentally summarize the key points. 3. Reflect the gist in your own words. 4. Begin your response with the pronoun "You."
Active Listening	Active listening goes beyond paraphrasing by detecting and expressing how the person feels, in addition to paraphrasing the reason for the feeling. The benefits of active listening are that it: • Helps make the person feel that you understand both the content and the feeling behind the content • Reduces defensiveness • Defuses emotional situations by helping the person calm down and devote energies to problem solving. There are four steps to effective active listening: 1. Listen to the details of what is being said. 2. Summarize the main points and feelings expressed verbally and nonverbally. 3. Reflect the feelings and content in your own words. 4. Use the format, "You feel . . . because . . . "

Interpersonal Communication: Reacting to Another Person's Point of View

Agreeing	If you like someone's ideas, say so. But make sure you state both "what" you like and "why" you like it. By communicating the value the idea has for you (why you like it), you give the person additional reinforcement for offering the idea. Use the phrase, "I like your ideas . . . because . . . ."
Constructive Disagreement	Three steps can help you disagree in a way that communicates that you want the person to continue sharing ideas. 1. State the merit in the idea. 2. Express your concerns. 3. Explore ideas for retaining the merit and eliminating your concerns. Here is an example of constructive disagreement. Suppose that you are responsible for getting out the newsletter, and you are having trouble finding space for all the information that needs to be included. Another Technician suggests that partial information about a decision be included in the newsletter, with a notice to call the office for more information. You respond: "What I like about your idea is that it would help us get out the newsletter very efficiently. What concerns me is that a lot of borrowers/producers have expressed interest in the outcome of that decision and I think answering the calls would take a lot of our time. Maybe I could edit some of the other articles so all the information on this decision could be included."
Rejecting Outright	It is important that you reject an idea or suggestion constructively in order to avoid hurt feelings and to create a favorable climate for future ideas. To reject an idea constructively: • Say you appreciate the idea or suggestion • Say that the idea or suggestion cannot be adopted • Explain why. An example of rejecting outright is a Technician responding to a borrower/ producer who says he has been told by a farmer in the neighboring county that he can take a loan and an LDP on the same bushels. The Technician might say: "I appreciate your checking this information out. But it's not possible to receive a loan and an LDP on the same bushels. The regulations just don't allow for such a transaction."

Interpersonal Communication: Reacting to Another Person's Point of View (continued)

Building on Ideas	If your reaction is to use the person's idea to stimulate your about another idea, we call this situation building on the idea. Building on ideas is essentially the process of adding value to or enhancing ideas. Building does not mean just offering up a new idea of your own on the subject. There are two steps to building on ideas. 1. Acknowledge the connection to the other person's idea. Use a phrase like, "What you said about . . . " to help you build. 2. Modify the idea to add value to it. You might add value by: • Identifying additional benefits of the idea • Finding other applications of the idea • Finding a more effective way to implement the idea. As an example, a Technician says, "I think we could use a training session to orient people to the new phone system." The CEO responds as, "You're right. The new system is complicated. What you've said makes me think that we should show the new employees how to use all the office machines."

Interpersonal Communication: Valuing Diversity

Valuing Diversity	Valuing diversity includes: • Treating people as individuals • Recognizing that people have differing needs, beliefs, and values and will require different kinds of help or support • Seeing the benefits to the organization of diverse backgrounds, experience, and values • Changing awareness, appreciating differences, refraining from prejudging, and avoiding stereotyping.
Importance of Communicating Across Cultures	• Ways of communicating are not universal. • Diversity is increasing. • Communication is essential to all enterprise.
Barriers to Communication	• Differences in styles • Assumptions • Difficulty talking about differences
Cultural Differences in Communication Styles	• Conventions for courtesy • Sequence • Phrasing • Specificity • Assertiveness • Candor • Simplicity • Accents • Telephone techniques
"Hot buttons"	• Jokes • Word selection • Swearing

Words to Communicate Emotions

Most of our feelings can be categorized in four groups: happy, sad, angry, and scared. Here is a list of feeling states. Notice the differences in intensity of feeling.

Happy	Sad	Angry	Scared
confident	ashamed	aggravated	afraid
content	awful	annoyed	anxious
delighted	bad	bothered	disoriented
energetic	depressed	bugged	distracted
excited	disappointed	burned up	fretful
exhilarated	discouraged	disgusted	frightened
fantastic	dissatisfied	fed up	insecure
glad	disturbed	frustrated	intimidated
good	down	furious	jumpy
great	embarrassed	impatient	lost
hopeful	helpless	incensed	mixed up
optimistic	hopeless	irate	nervous
pleased	inadequate	irked	overwhelmed
positive	lonely	irritated	powerless
proud	lost	mad	tense
relieved	low	mean	threatened
satisfied	miserable	peeved	timid
secure	sorry	resentful	troubled
thrilled	terrible	riled	uncertain
up	uneasy	vexed	uncomfortable
	unhappy		uneasy
	upset		unsure
			worried

Tips for Managing Your Emotions

Tips for Managing Your Own Emotions
• Be aware of and recognize your signs of anger, annoyance, and frustration. Know your own "hot buttons" and recognize when employee behaviors are likely to trigger them. • Learn how to take time out from a discussion if you need to cool off and get your emotions under control. Develop some techniques for skillfully ending a conversation if you feel yourself getting emotional. • Remind yourself of why it is important to solve the problem, what your goal is, and what the consequences of not solving it might be. • Do not take the person's behavior personally. The behavior likely is not meant as an attack on or an affront to you. • Reframe what you are experiencing. If you cannot change the way someone is reacting to feedback, then you might need to alter your perception of the experience. Reframing might mean changing a negative assumption about an employee's behavior and transforming the interpretation into a positive one. • Let it go. Talk to a trusted ally and then drop the subject. Minimize the effects that challenging behaviors have on you. • Be reflective about the situation. Spend structured time reflecting about what you did in a difficult situation, why you did it, and what you could do in a similar situation in the future.