NB_360_10_29, Performance Planning for Fiscal Year 2011

National Bulletin: 360-10-29 **Date:** Seoptember 27, 2010

Subject: PER - Performance Planning for Fiscal Year 2011

Action Required By: November 30, 2010

Purpose. To provide General Schedule (GS) employees with performance planning guidance for fiscal year (FY) 2011. Performance planning includes communicating FY 2011 organizational goals, setting performance expectations, and establishing individual performance objectives and plans. Performance plans for GS employees must be completed by **November 30, 2010**.

Expiration Date. March 31, 2011

Background. Performance management is the systematic process of **planning, monitoring, developing, rating and rewarding** performance. This national bulletin provides supplemental and procedural guidance to Part 409 of the General Manual. Included below are highlights of the performance planning components of the performance management policy, performance management updates based on USDA Departmental Regulation 4040-430, Performance Management and clarification of policy contained in the General Manual.

More information on this process can be found on OPM's Performance Management website at: http://www.opm.gov/perform/overview.asp.

Policy for the Performance Management System can be found in the General Manual, Title 360, Part 409, Performance Management System, in the eDirectives System at http://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/.

Performance Plan Period

The FY 2011 performance plan period for all employees is October 1, 2010, through September 30, 2011. All employees must have new written performance plans for FY 2011 with measurable performance objectives and standards by **November 30, 2010**. Employees will remain under existing plans until the new plans are in effect. Rating officials should ensure plans are entered into EmpowHR, which includes obtaining the reviewing official's concurrence and employee's review by the due date of **November 30, 2010**. Reviewing officials must review and approve all performance plans within their span of control to ensure consistency among plans established for similar positions and conformity with organizational objectives. Plans are not considered effective and final until the rating official, reviewing official, and employee have reviewed and signed-off on the plan.

Rating Official

The rating official is the employee's supervisor of record or acting supervisor. There is no minimum time period for the supervisor to have been in the position before becoming a rating official.

Reviewing Official

The reviewing official is the employee's second-level supervisor. Responsibilities of the reviewing official include reviewing and approving the performance plans for consistency, fairness, objectivity, and ensuring that plans reflect the overall needs and goals of the Agency.

Performance Plans

Employee performance plans must communicate, in writing, performance objectives and standards/measures to be used in evaluating the employee's performance during FY 2011. Performance plans are meant to be flexible, meaning that if NRCS priorities, higher-level organizational objectives, or direct-supervisor expectations change during the performance cycle, performance plans should be

appropriately updated and approved by the rating official, employee, and reviewing official.

Performance plans must contain at least three, but no more than seven performance elements. The use of non-critical elements is optional and at the supervisors' discretion. The supervisor should designate each performance element as either critical or non-critical.

Required elements (all of which must be Critical) and element descriptions may be found in the table below:

All Employees must have ...	**Mission Results.** Demonstrates support for Agency strategic goals and initiatives within own organizational unit and contributes to the achievement of overall Agency initiatives. Stresses accountability and continuous improvement to employees/team members, makes timely and effective decisions, and produces results through strategic thinking and decisive action.
	Customer Service. (NEW) Provides advice that is timely, responsive and accurate. Maintains appropriate rapport with internal and external customers. Develops and establishes working relationships with external organizations as required. Keeps supervisor informed of difficult and/or controversial issues and unique problems. Takes action to effectively solve problems before they have an adverse impact on the organization or other employees.
Managers and Supervisors must have ...	**Supervision/Leadership/Management.** Work is assigned in a fair and effective manner. Technical guidance to subordinate staff is ordinarily provided in a timely manner. Performance management is implemented in accordance with procedure. Issues, concerns, or problems are handled promptly and fairly. To the extent possible, staff is properly trained and complies with occupational health and safety programs. Management decisions are supported and implemented within appropriate timeframes.
	Equal Opportunity/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 an awareness of EO/CR policies and responsibilities of Agency and Departmental goals of valuing a diverse, yet unified workforce.
Non-supervisory employees must have ... (although this can be combined with another Critical element)	**Personal Contacts-Equal Opportunity/Civil Rights.** Routinely displays courteous and tactful behavior towards internal and external customers, supervisors, coworkers, and/or team members. Projects a positive and professional image of USDA. 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 an awareness of EO/CR policies and responsibilities of Agency and departmental goals of valuing a diverse, yet unified workforce.

See the NRCS People Share Point site for a listing of Performance Elements.

Cascading Objectives and Alignment

Effective performance management requires that employees have a direct "line of sight" between performance expectations and the Agency's mission and strategic objectives. To accomplish this alignment, employee performance objectives must be aligned with the NRCS Strategic Plan and with the Agency's current priorities, which are aligned with Departmental priorities.

Individual performance objectives should cascade from objectives established for Senior Executive Service (SES) members at each level of the Agency. By linking employee performance objectives with executive performance objectives, supervisors demonstrate to employees how their performance contributes to the Agency's achievements. **Alignment is only required for the mission results element.**

When linking individual objectives to higher-level objectives at the next level above the employee:

Start with a higher-level objective that is relevant to an employee's job and work downward to develop an individual performance objective.

See the NRCS People Share Point site for information on Alignment and How To Cascade Objectives.

Once the FY 2011 priorities have been identified, Human Resources Strategy and Accountability (HRSA) will develop and post the sample State Conservationist Plan. We anticipate this information to be communicated by the middle of October, 2010.

Performance Objectives and Standards/Measures

NRCS continues to move towards simplifying and focusing individual performance objectives to ensure all employees are clear about their priorities for the current year and how their accomplishments help the Agency meet its current year objectives. Generally, an individual performance plan should be no more than 2 to 3 typed pages. Once the performance plan is entered into EmpowHR, each performance element will print on a separate page.

To assist supervisors and employees in developing performance objectives, example performance objectives and performance plan templates have been developed based on workshops with a variety of occupational series within NRCS. These examples should be used as a guide to assist supervisors and employees in developing tailored SMART performance objectives that are appropriate for the individual's position and work level (entry, journeyman, expert). All objectives must adhere to the SMART criteria, "Specific, Measurable, Aligned with Strategic Plans, Realistic, and Time Bound." These Performance Plan Templates can be found on the NRCS People Share Point site.

Source documents such as the employee's position description; business plans, instructions, project proposals, and goals; job analysis; equal opportunity action plans; and or any other source that assigns responsibility for the accomplishment of work are good references for developing performance objectives and standards/measures. These documents and the support materials provide a foundation for supervisors and employees to use to develop the current year (FY 2011) individual performance plan.

Performance objectives communicate the critically important outcomes, or end-results, the employee is expected to accomplish by the end of the appraisal period. Performance objectives are not complete unless they include performance standards that clearly define the indicators for determining the success of the objective. Performance objectives and standards must be developed at the "meets fully successful" level. At "meets fully successful" level, the employee can achieve the objective and meet the expectations set forth by the supervisor regarding the type of actions that must be accomplished and the quality/quantity/timeliness of those actions. Performance objectives and standards must include credible measures of performance that are observable, measurable, and/or demonstrable. Specific measures of quality, quantity, timeliness, cost effectiveness, and/or manner of performance require supervisors and employees to identify which measures are appropriate. Templates and examples may be used as a resource and provide a foundation of information for supervisors and employees to use to develop the current year individual performance objectives.

The following information on the Performance Planning process may be found on the NRCS People Share Point site.

Alignment and Cascading Objectives
Checklist for Performance Plans
Examples of Recruiting and Hiring Measures
Instructions and Tools for Writing SMART Performance Objectives and Standards
Performance Elements
Performance Objectives and Standards and Measures
Step by Step Instructions on EmpowHR Performance Plan Process
Tips for Creating FY 2011 Performance Plans in EmpowHR

Hiring Reform (New for FY 2011)

On May 11, 2010, the President signed a Memorandum on Improving the Federal Recruitment and Hiring Process. The goal of this Hiring Reform is to streamline the hiring process to make it easier for agencies to recruit highly qualified applicants. Hiring Reform calls for the engagement of hiring managers.

To ensure the success of this initiative, performance plans for managers and supervisors must include appropriate measures for recruiting and hiring highly qualified employees and supporting their successful transition into Federal service. These measures are to be included in the "Supervision/Leadership/Management" element. For Examples of Recruiting and Hiring Measures, see the NRCS People Share Point site.

Employee Involvement

Participation of both the supervisor and the employee is an essential element of effective performance management. Rating officials should communicate what their own individual performance objectives are, how they align with the Agency's objectives, and what their expectations are for their direct reports regarding how the employee will contribute to meeting those overarching objectives. Based on that information, the employee should draft a set of performance objectives and provide it to their supervisor for review and feedback. The final authority for establishing performance objectives and plans rests with the supervisor.

Tips for Processing Plans in EmpowHR

Employees and supervisors are encouraged to conduct expectations and performance discussions, prepare performance plans in Microsoft Word or Excel, gain reviewing official approval, and then cut and paste the plans into EmpowHR. **Tips for Creating FY 2011 Performance Plans in EmpowHR and Step by Step Instructions on the EmpowHR Performance Plan Process** may be found on the NRCS People Share Point site.

Individual Development Plans (IDP)

Each employee is encouraged to discuss short- and long-term learning and development goals with the supervisor and to develop an IDP. Rating officials retain sole discretion to determine the extent to which an IDP may be implemented taking into consideration operational requirements and budgetary limitations.

NRCS employees can create and manage IDPs in AgLearn using the "My Plan" feature under Careers. To learn more, employees can complete the "AgLearn IDP Course."

Training

An online training course covering all aspects of performance management has been developed and is available on AgLearn. The course is titled "Performance Management in USDA" and is course number DA-PerformanceManagement-01. AgLearn may be found at: http://www.aglearn.usda.gov/

Human Resources Tracking

The local Human Resources Servicing Office is responsible for monitoring the status of performance plans and reporting a weekly status to Agency leadership and Human Resources Strategy and Accountability beginning Friday, October 15, 2010.

Weekly status should be reported on the NRCS People Share Pointe site.

Contact. If you have any questions regarding the year-end summary performance appraisal, contact Stephen Crisp, Human Resources Strategy and Accountability Division, at (202) 720-2631 or by e-mail at stephen.crisp@wdc.usda.gov. For questions regarding EmpowHR, contact your local Human Resources Servicing Office.

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