

*From Dr. Shafer's memo dated July 6, 2007*

Performance Evaluations

Government agencies are being held ever more accountable for defining performance expectations that align with and support organizational goals. All performance plans must align with organizational goals, something we all have tried to complete before now. As we have discussed on other occasions, all line managers are to hold employees accountable for achieving results. Performance plans must include credible measures of performance such as quality, quantity, timeliness, cost effectiveness, and customer perspective. Performance plans need to define standards and specific goals that will be used to determine whether organizational objectives are met. Supervisors and Research Leaders must make sure that each employee's performance plan has specific goals that support the identified strategic goals you already identified. *Please double-check all your employees' performance plans and identify and/or update a Strategic Plan Goal(s) if needed.*

A "Fully Successful" rating for a given element requires the least supporting justification. "Does Not Meet" and "Exceeds" must be supported by clear documentation that the employee's performance does indeed fall below or above the expectations set in the performance plan. It is in each employee's and supervisor's best interest to become proficient at documenting performance in terms of quantity, quality, and impact. Research Leaders should be particularly familiar with these concepts, which are at the heart of the RPES process. These same concepts of documenting an accomplishment *and its impact* are usefully applied to performance appraisals of all employees, regardless of their position.

EEO - Reflecting the Federal Government's commitment to equal employment opportunity, all employees must have one critical element in their performance plan that addresses EEO. Like all other elements, we expect all employees to perform at the Fully Successful level; the Supervisor must document clear evidence to support a Does Not Meet or Exceeds Fully Successful rating. In order to recommend an Exceeds rating in the critical element addressing EEO, there must be identified accomplishment(s) that exceeds expectations. On September 9, 2005, we distributed a memo with examples (note: this memo shows *examples* meant to stimulate your own creativity, not provide an exhaustive list of acceptable activities) of mission-related activities that could be considered as demonstrating activities that warrant a rating of Exceeds for those employees with a stand-alone EEO element. Please ensure all employees are aware of the expectations and requirement for demonstrated accomplishments. Contact Marie Bishop in the MWA Office if you have questions.

Safety and Health - In the past year, we also have been emphasizing the need to support the safety and health programs. We have communicated that in order to support an Exceeds on an employee's safety element, there must be accomplishment(s) that demonstrate activities above and beyond routine expectations. If you have an employee for whom you want to provide an Exceeds or Does Not

Meet rating on the SHEM-related element, you must provide clear supporting documentation.

Milestones and Deliverables – The Milestones and Deliverables that are in a scientist’s OSQR Plan should be used as a starting point to determine if that scientist Meets or Exceeds his/her Plans and Conducts Research Element. There may be very good reasons why a milestone or deliverable was not met, and these need to be documented carefully so that the Area Office can, if necessary, work with the Unit and NPS to revise expectations when resource limitations or unexpected circumstances prevent a scientist’s best intentions to meet objectives, milestones, and deliverables on schedule. Similarly, a scientist who is able to exceed expectations by achieving a milestone, etc., ahead of time or with unexpectedly great results should be recognized for this accomplishment. Make sure consideration of milestones and deliverables are a prominent part of the documentation for the Plans and Conducts Research element.

OSQR Results – I wrote above about OSQR, but I am returning to it here with respect to the requirement to link OSQR review results to scientists’ performance appraisals. All line managers, all the way to the Administrator’s Office, are being held increasingly responsible for improving the Agency’s peer review scores for project plans. Although the Lead Scientist and Research Leader are the primary parties responsible for the summary ratings for project plans (i.e., No Revision, Minor Revision, Moderate Revision, Major Revision, Not Feasible), every SY participating in the preparation of the project plan – not just the Lead Scientist - bears responsibility for its content and quality. Performance appraisals must take OSQR results into account if a plan was peer-reviewed during the current appraisal year. When a project plan achieves a summary rating of No Revision Required or Minor Revision in the first panel review, *all SYs on the project plan* can point to this fine accomplishment to help justify a rating of Exceeds Fully Successful for the Plans and Conducts Research performance element in that year. Conversely, if a project plan receives a summary rating of Major Revision Required or Not Feasible in the first panel review, *all scientists on the project plan* will not exceed a rating of Fully Successful for the Plans and Conducts Research performance element in that year. A rating of Moderate Revision will have a neutral effect on these ratings. The result of peer review will have a similar impact on the Research Leader’s rating for the Leadership element in that year.

Publication requirements and 3-year summary for Category I SY performance evaluations – To warrant a Fully Successful rating on the Demonstrated Research Accomplishments performance element, each Cat 1 SY is required to have at least two refereed publications per year, including one on which the Cat 1 is the Principal Author (as considered by RPES). If the Research Leader wishes to exercise some flexibility in this requirement, it must be justified by written supervisor’s comments accompanying the performance appraisal. Those written comments will be a basis for discussion with the Area Office on a final rating on this performance element.

We have seen much variation in the detail and presentation about publications provided with performance appraisals. Our willingness to get information in a format preferred by each Research Leader has resulted in continued uncertainties in the Area Office, giving us concern that we may be inconsistent in evaluating SY accomplishments from different Units. It is essential in my view to know that each of the MWA's 350+ SYs are getting an equal consideration with regard to their publication accomplishments. So that we can fully appreciate each SY's publication record, please submit a three-year publication list following the format attached to this memo; this list will *NOT* count toward the page limits of the performance evaluation document. This list will ensure that the SY gets full recognition for publications submitted during the current appraisal year, and we can spot any positive or negative trends based on the two previous years. My suggestion is that Research Leaders delegate this task to the individual SYs; it should not take more than a few minutes for each SY to prepare this for him/herself, and the significance of doing it accurately for a person's annual performance should be apparent. Regardless of who prepares these lists, the format must be followed.

As I have said in the past, there will be a higher expectation for senior scientists than for early-career SYs with regard to justifying an "Exceeds" on the Demonstrated Research Accomplishments element. In addition, every Category 1 SY should be the senior author on a paper now and then, regardless of the nature of your program or your stage of career. The primary job of every ARS Cat 1 SY is to conduct and publish research. We expect each Cat 1 to develop a program that demonstrates s/he is a leader in a particular scientific field. Although we do recognize the concept of "principal author" as in RPES, every ARS scientist should be demonstrating his/her own scientific leadership, not just leadership that provides opportunities for senior authorship by others (i.e., students, postdocs, etc.).