Performance Management for Managers
Best Practices

The performance management process is more than just the annual performance review. The process includes setting clear expectations and providing specific and ongoing formal and informal feedback.

The University's Performance Management and Appraisal policy requires all Officers and Non-Union Support Staff (NUSS) to receive an annual performance review.

The Performance Management Process

Overview

The performance management process should be occurring throughout the entire year. It includes setting clear expectations and providing specific and ongoing formal and informal feedback to staff. When all elements are completed thoughtfully, with the active engagement of both manager and staff, the results for all parties (including the University as a whole) are very positive.

This critical dialogue between managers and their staff sets the platform for ongoing coaching, and ultimately, the final performance appraisal at the end of the fiscal year.

Key to being a good performance manager

As a performance manager, you can be confident that you are being fair and consistent with your staff if you:

- Use data and observations as the basis for recognition and reward decisions
- Create an environment where employees can grow and develop their skills—enhancing their contributions and commitment to the University
- Ensure your Team is working toward the University's and your school or department's strategies and goals

Benefit of performance reviews

The annual performance review process provides the University community with a framework to recognize the achievements of employees over the past year and begin the conversation about new and ongoing performance goals for the upcoming fiscal year.

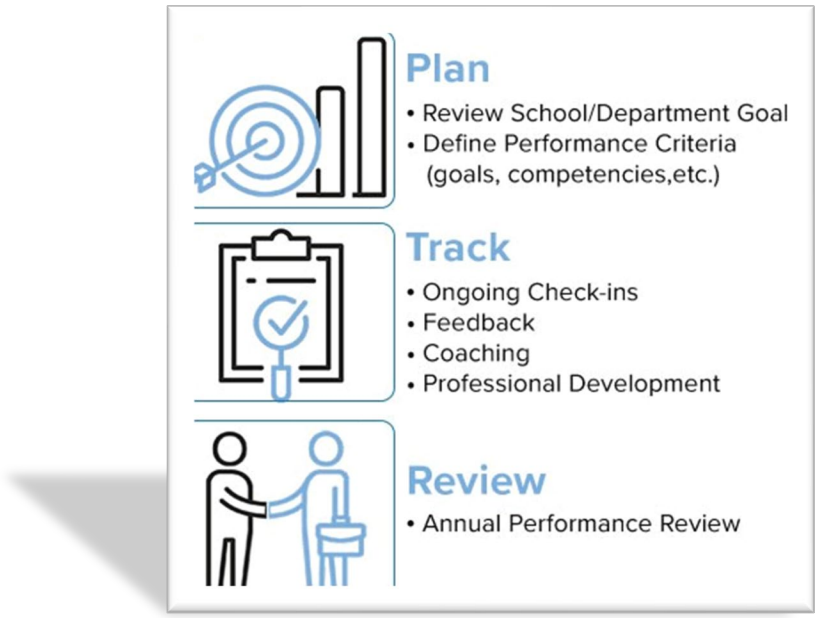
Performance appraisals are powerful motivational tools that engage employees in the department's goals. A clearly defined set of expectations and an understanding of how their goals fit into the overall goals of the school or department encourage employees to succeed.

The performance appraisal process is an opportunity to measure performance against the objectives and behaviors (performance competencies) required for success.

Performance appraisals allow managers to provide staff coaching and support in a structured way. Performance appraisals allow managers to document an employee's strengths, areas of development, and opportunities for career growth.

A key component of supporting and elevating an employee's performance is the relationship with their direct supervisor. More than a written form, the dialogue between managers and their staff members will help reinforce target goals for the individual, team, department, and University at large.

The Performance Management Workflow



Step 1: Plan

- ✓ Review School/Department Goals
- ✓ Define Performance Criteria (goals, competencies, etc.)

Step 2: Track

- ✓ Ongoing Check-ins
- ✓ Feedback
- ✓ Coaching
- ✓ Professional Development

Step 3: Review

- ✓ Annual Performance Review

Step 1: Plan

Review School/Department Goals

As a manager, it is your responsibility to clearly communicate to your staff the importance of individual performance goals with the overall school or department goals (or your own performance goals).

As a manager, questions to ask yourself include:

- Are the goals I'm setting for my staff members clearly linked to the overall goals of the school/department?
- Will my staff see how their work contributes to the goals of the school or department?

Define Performance Criteria

It is important to establish a clear performance plan by identifying key elements or actions the staff member will complete and demonstrate during the fiscal year. There are usually two components to creating an employee's performance plan for the fiscal year:

- **Goals:** The staff members' performance plan should include goals for the performance period. Consider the staff member's job description and work with the employee to identify three to five goals for the year. As noted above, these goals should align with the goals of the school/department.

- **Competency:** To ensure employees understand the skills and interpersonal behaviors essential to meeting job performance standards, it is important to include key competencies as part of the performance criteria during the goal-setting process. Competition represents the basic knowledge, skills, abilities, and behaviors that enable staff to be successful in their roles. Managers may indicate or define target competencies or select from a predefined list within the online tool.

Agreement on Goals

Your role as a manager is to identify and communicate your department's overall objectives to your staff and translate them into individual objectives.

Discussing and reaching an agreement on objectives at the beginning of the cycle will lead to a successful end-of-cycle performance appraisal discussion with minimal anxiety and no surprises.

The number of goals (typically 3-5 for each individual) should reasonably reflect the most important accomplishments required for success. Consider the work to be done and the desired results. Describing the goals using the three elements below will increase the probability of you and your staff member having the same understanding of the goal.

- **Outcome:** An outcome describes what needs to be achieved. Outcomes will vary in scope. Some performance goals may be single tasks. Other performance goals may be large-scale projects. Example: *To improve the response time required for student inquiries.*

- **Measurement:** The measurement describes how both you and your staff members will describe the work to be done and assess whether the goal has been successfully completed. Example: *Reduce the response time required for student inquiries from the current 10.5 hours to 7.5 hours.*

- **Timeframe:** The timeframe establishes a specific target date for achieving the results. A clear timeline enables the staff member to set appropriate priorities when completing multiple tasks. It also avoids differing assumptions between staff members and managers about the priority of the task. Example: *Reduce the response time required for student inquiries from the current 10.5 hours to 7.5 hours by the end of the fall semester.*

As a manager, questions to ask when writing goals:

- How does this goal support school/department goals?
- What do you expect to be accomplished?
- Why is this important?
- Who does this benefit?
- Who is involved?
- Due date?
- How (i.e., action steps)?
- How will you know when the objective is achieved (e.g., measures, observations, completion, accuracy)?
- Is there any room for misinterpretation on the part of the employee?

Identify Key Performance Milestones

The extent to which you detail the specific actions you expect the employee to take will depend on the requirements of your school or department performance management process and your assessment of the staff members' current performance on tasks similar in nature to the defined goals.

The ePerformance tool will allow you to indicate the percentage of work completed when the performance plan is established, target due dates and other key details to clarify and confirm successful work standards.

For staff members with lower current performance levels: you will want to have a direct role in specifying the actions required to meet expected performance standards.

For staff members with higher performance levels: you will be able to develop their plans more independently.

With detailed planning, the probability of performance goals being achieved increases significantly. Consider who should own the building of the action plan. Whether you, the staff member, or both of you build the plan, it is the manager's responsibility to establish a viable plan.

Key Points to Remember:

- Effective performance planning considers the day-to-day job focus and project-oriented goals.

- Performance goals should be stated clearly and succinctly. Both the manager and employee should have a clear picture of the expected outcome, how success will be measured and the timeframe in which the work will be done.
- Managers should be able to describe to staff how their individual work contributes to the goals of the school or department.
- The probability of performance goals being achieved increases with detailed planning.

Step 2: Track

Determine Coaching Requirements

Coaching provides ongoing feedback to your staff members and can be positive or constructive in nature. As a manager, you have a responsibility to provide ongoing coaching to your staff members based on their needs in either formalized meetings and/or on an ad hoc basis.

Coaching requirements are not the same for all employees. In fact, coaching requirements are not even consistent for one employee working on different tasks. Employees have differing levels of skill for all the tasks they perform.

As an effective coach, you must be aware of the skill gaps, opportunities, guidance, and support each employee may require. Employees with lower performance levels may require greater coaching support, while employees with higher performance levels may require less.

Coaching takes place throughout the year. **How frequently you meet to discuss progress will depend on two things:**

1. The expectations of your school/department
2. The performance levels you identified for each task required to achieve the performance goals.

Confirm with your staff how frequently you will meet to assess progress. Be explicit about whether you or the staff member is responsible for establishing your meetings. Continue to discuss development needs and keep ongoing documentation of both accomplishments and development needs.

Tips for both formal and informal coaching opportunities with your staff:

- Focus on the most important priorities
- Describe specific situations and behavior

- Focus on the work, not the individual; relate feedback to goals and expectations
- Balance positive and constructive statements
- Try to see things from their perspective; share your own experiences, if relevant
- Present corrective feedback in a positive, action-oriented way
- Ensure that the individual understands by asking him or her to summarize
- Follow up to monitor improvements and set follow-up dates

Provide Ongoing Coaching and Feedback

People need reinforcement, especially when developing new skills and abilities or addressing new challenges. A key responsibility of a good coach is to find situations where staff members are doing well and provide detailed, positive feedback.

Similarly, when coaches observe ineffective work or behavior, they have a responsibility to provide feedback that highlights what is not going well and how it can be addressed.

Ensure Professional Development

Professional development initiatives may include new projects, stretch assignments, project team leadership, job shadowing, cross-training, multi-disciplinary team initiatives, relevant higher education, job role or industry conferences, and professional development workshops and programs available through the Learning & Development team.

Clear the Path: Providing What They Need

As part of the coaching and feedback process, managers must ensure the employee has the time, resources, and information required to execute the requested assignments. **There are two aspects to clearing the path for your staff:**

1. Resolving any barriers that are impeding progress
2. Leveraging enablers that will accelerate the achievement of results

As managers work to resolve barriers and leverage enablers, they create a supportive environment for their staff.

Key Points to Remember

- Managers should determine how much coaching each employee needs for each of the tasks or goals assigned. One employee may need significant coaching on one task and be able to complete others quite independently.

- Coaching is an ongoing process which takes place in formal meetings, as well as in ad hoc conversations.
- Managers have the responsibility to clear the path for their staff – removing barriers and leveraging enables of success.

Step 3: Review

Seek Additional Input

Throughout each step of the performance management process, provide direction, feedback and support to your staff as they progress through their assigned work.

- At least once a year you will be expected to formally review the performance of your staff and provide written feedback.

- The final step in performance Management is to formally document a review or summary of the employee's performance throughout the fiscal year. The employees' review is heavily dependent on the previous two steps. To provide accurate and balanced performance reviews, it is essential that managers take time to establish and update performance goals or criteria and provide coaching, development, and feedback.

- The notes you create about initial goals and progress throughout the reporting period will enable you to approach the final performance review clearly and confidently. The final feedback should contain no surprises for the manager or the employee.

- Both manager and employee should provide input into documenting the employee's formal review, with the manager responsible for documenting the final review.

Provide Feedback on Results

The feedback you provide to your staff should:

- Reflect on the time available for each type of work. If an individual is expected to spend 90% of their time on daily job responsibilities and 10% on projects, then the feedback should reflect that ratio.

- Be balanced with input from both staff members and managers and with acknowledgment of both positive and negative experiences throughout the review period.

- Include performance review input from both the manager and employee. The purpose is to assess what has happened but also to identify ways in which the staff member, the manager, or the school or department could have created even better results.

- Be based on your direct observations or on validated input from reliable sources, including other colleagues who can provide a fair assessment of the employee's work.

Determine Performance Ratings

Managers must assign ratings consistently for all staff members. To do this, you must first clearly understand the University's rating system. Explaining the rating method to staff members prior to discussing individual scores will allow them to understand their results in an appropriate context.

The Columbia University rating system in the recommended Performance Appraisal form is below. You must understand and be able to explain how you determine the overall rating for the work you are reviewing.

- **Level 5 | Outstanding:** Performance levels and accomplishments far exceeded planned expectations. This category is reserved for the employee who truly stands out and clearly and consistently demonstrates exceptional accomplishments in terms of engagement as well as quality and quantity of work that is easily recognized as truly exceptional by others.

- **Level 4 | Exceeds expectations:** Performance frequently exceeds job requirements. Accomplishments are regularly above expected levels. Performance and engagement are sustained at a level beyond expectations, and the quality of work is uniformly high.

- **Level 3 | Meets expectations:** Consistently demonstrates effective performance. Performance is reflective of a fully qualified and experienced individual in this position. Viewed as someone who effectively prioritizes work and

can accomplish planned goals. Contributes to the overall objectives of the department and or the organization. Achieves valuable accomplishments in several critical areas of the job.

- **Level 2 | Needs Improvement:** Working toward gaining proficiency. Demonstrates satisfactory performance inconsistently. Achieves some but not all goals and is acquiring necessary knowledge and skills. Opportunity for improved engagement. For new employees: this rating can be used when still coming up to speed with expectations, performance, and interpersonal conduct within the new role.

- **Level 1 | Does Not Meet Expectations:** Performance consistently below expectations. Reasonable progress toward critical goals was not made and/or interpersonal conduct does not meet University standards. Significant improvement is needed in one or more important areas. A plan to correct performance, including timelines, must be outlined and monitored to measure progress.

It is helpful to allow the staff member to assess their own performance, including their view of the rating score, because:

- Encouraging discussion about why they selected the rating can lead to productive insights.
- It allows the staff member to articulate the things they did well that support a positive rating and examine ideas about the tangible differences that would have allowed a higher score.
- These insights can be used in the final element of Reviewing Performance, as you both consider opportunities for this staff member's ongoing development.

Lead the Performance Review Discussion

The manager should schedule a formal performance review meeting to debrief the employee and manager's written or online feedback. Both the manager and employee should compare what the employee achieved against the stated performance criteria or goals, using the Outcome/Measurement/Timeframe model. Additionally, you should review how the employee achieved those results.

Consider your school or department's stated or generally understood values:

- Are there particular behaviors your school or department promotes, such as integrity, collaboration, valuing diversity, continuous learning, etc.?

- What actions did the staff member take to achieve the results?
- How did the staff member behave with others to achieve results?
- Were there special circumstances that made the goal particularly challenging?

This assessment of results allows you to provide feedback about:

- What was achieved?;
- Strengths that can be recognized and leveraged; and
- Challenges that require further coaching and improvement.

Build Plans for Further Development

Building plans for further development is a logical and positive final step of the review process.

The employee's perception of this activity is derived from the manager's approach throughout the whole performance management process because:

- If the manager has consistently used the performance management process to guide and enrich the capability of the staff member, this step will be viewed with enthusiasm and interest.
- If the process has been judgmental and not supportive, then this step will be viewed as an administrative requirement that will not receive attention and action.

The areas selected for development should be clearly defined, in much the same manner as the original performance goals established using the Outcome, Measurement, Timeframe format.

The staff member should be able to see how the new skills or knowledge will be acquired and how they are expected to be applied to the current job role and as preparation for future job roles. **Specifically:**

- If the planned development is a requirement to achieve satisfactory performance in the current job role, then the specifications for achieving the development must be very precise, with tightly controlled timelines.
- If the development efforts are focused on longer-term staff for a job role that may not yet be determined, the timeliness may be more relaxed.

Key Points to Remember

- Involving staff in each performance review element will allow greater engagement and acceptance of the final performance review.

- Reviewing results at the end of the performance cycle should be focused on facts.
- Consideration should be given to how results were achieved, as well as what was achieved.
- Managers must be able to explain the overall performance rating they assign and clearly understand what would have made the performance scores higher or lower.
- Plans for future development may include addressing specific requirements for current job performance or longer-term development for future roles.

Performance Competencies

The Annual Performance Review

The annual performance review process provides the University community a framework to recognize the achievements of staff over the past year and begin the conversation about new and ongoing performance goals for the upcoming fiscal year.

Performance appraisals are powerful motivational tools that engage employees in the department's broader goals. A clearly defined set of expectations and an understanding of how their goals fit into the department's/school's/administrative unit's overall goals encourage employees to succeed. The performance appraisal process is an opportunity to recognize performance against the objectives and behaviors (performance competencies) required for success.

Performance appraisals allow managers to provide staff coaching and support in a structured way. Writing performance appraisals allows the manager to document an employee's strengths, areas of development, and opportunities for career growth. A key aspect of supporting and elevating employees' performance is the relationship with their direct supervisor. More than a written form, the dialogue between managers and their staff will help reinforce target goals for the individual, team, department, and University at large.

About Performance Competencies

ePerformance, the University's online performance appraisal tool, contains a library of 20 competencies that managers can select. Managers also have the option to design or load their own competency into the online tool.

About Development Plans

ePerformance summarizes plans for development in the staff member’s current role and career. During the initial performance planning step and as part of ongoing coaching and

feedback discussions throughout the year, managers should identify core skills for further development and provide resources for the staff's continued learning and growth. Professional development initiatives may include new projects, stretch assignments, project team leadership, job shadowing, cross training, multi-disciplinary team initiatives, relevant higher education, job role or industry conferences and professional development workshops available through the Learning & Development team.

Refer to the
HR Toolkit: Performance Management for Managers webpage for more resources,
or contact your local HR representative.