

Guide for Writing USDA Performance Plans

Performance Elements and Measureable Standards

Note: The following elements and standards exemplify the performance elements used in various USDA agencies. Please check your Agency guidelines and confer with your servicing Human Resources Office for additional information and resources.

**USDA
Departmental Administration
Office of Human Capital Management**

Table of Contents

Topic	Page
Writing Results Oriented Elements	3
Creating Measurable Standards	4
Types of Measures for Performance Standards – Quality, Quantity, Timeliness, Cost Effectiveness, Manner of Performance	4
Customer and Employee Perspective	6
Tips for Developing Elements and Standards	7
Indications of Good Measurements	8
A Word About Retention (Minimally Successful) Standards	9
Avoid Backward Standards	10
Strategic Alignment Example	11
Explanation of Document Format	12
Mission Support/Execution of Duties and/or Program Management/Project Management Element & Accompanying Standards	13
Program Management Element & Accompanying Standards	16
Communication Element & Accompanying Standards	18
Team Leadership Element & Accompanying Standards	20
Individual Contribution to the Team Element & Accompanying Standards	21
Research and Analysis Element & Accompanying Standards	22
Resource Management Element & Accompanying Standards	23
Customer Service Element & Accompanying Standards	24
Personally Identifiable Information & Accompanying Standards	25
Non-Supervisor EEO/CR Element & Accompanying Standards (All)	26
Non-Supervisory Safety and Health Standards (where warranted)	26
Supervisory – Supervision Element & Accompanying Standards	27
Supervisory – Supervision Element –Employee Perspective	28
Supervisory – Supervision Element – Customer Perspective	29
Supervisory – Supervision Element - Performance Management & Accompanying Standards	31
Supervisory – Safety and Health Element & Accompanying Standards	31
Supervisory – EEO/CR Element & Accompanying Standards	32

This performance management desk guide includes material to help supervisors and managers in the writing of elements and standards as they prepare performance plans. This material explains how to develop good performance elements and measurable standards. This document contains several job aids, including some examples of generic results-oriented elements and measurable standards.

**WRITING
RESULTS-
ORIENTED
ELEMENTS**

Your first task is to identify the four or five primary results-oriented responsibilities.

Tips for determining which responsibilities qualify as elements:

- The employee spends a significant portion of a day, week or month doing it. Is this a significant job component?
- The employee has primary control over the outcomes.
- The employee has full authority to perform this element.
- The task impacts on the organization's ability to accomplish its mission or meet its goals.
- It is distinguishable from other performance elements.
- Is there a negative consequence to the organization's mission if this is performed inadequately or the end product not produced?

To determine the most important performance elements, look at these factors:

- Frequency of the responsibility execution.
- Length of time it takes to complete the responsibility.
- Whether the employee controls the outcome of the responsibility
- Level of difficulty
- Potential adverse consequences Impact on the organization

Responsibilities must be worded as results-oriented elements. The elements should:

- Capture the scope of the responsibility.
- Contain a verb and have an object.
- State the responsibilities in terms of outcomes or outputs to the extent possible.

Results and/or outcomes are easily identifiable when action verbs are used in the performance element description, such as:

- To provide ...
- To ensure ...
- To improve ...
- To reduce ...

Whenever possible, performance elements should be linked to

**CREATING
MEASURABLE
Standards**

specific organizational goals or objectives. This may be indicated by citing, in parentheses, reference to the goal(s)/objective(s) following the description of the performance element.

The purpose for having standards is to be as specific and objective as possible in communicating to the employee what is expected as they execute their duties.

The standard should:

- Be clearly written and unambiguous
- Be free from bias, personal feelings, or opinions
- Contain finite measures that specify the line between satisfactory work and less-than-satisfactory work

The measure should directly link the required performance of the job to the organization's overall mission. It should also be consistently applied to all personnel in the same or similar position or grade with the same authority.

An effective standard is one where the supervisor can realistically observe and monitor performance to ascertain whether the standard has been met. Measurable standards should be described for the required levels of performance. The "fully successful" level of performance means that an experienced and competent employee will consistently achieve or meet the performance standards for the job given circumstances within his or her control.

Keep in mind that the wording must leave room for an employee to exceed the "fully successful" standard.

**TYPES OF
MEASURES**

The following types of measures must be included in performance standards to ensure adequate performance assessment: **quantity, quality, timeliness, cost effectiveness** and/or **manner of performance**. Job tasks will include at least one and, in many cases, a combination of these types of measures.

Critical elements that focus on competencies can also be important and desirable to include in plans, but a results-oriented performance plan should describe most requirements in terms of results.

Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that performance standards for individual subordinate employees clearly align with organization mission, Government Performance Results Act strategic goals, or other program or policy objectives, and take into account the degree of rigor in the appraisal of their employees. Supervisory plans must include a critical element that includes accountability for the performance management of their subordinates.

QUALITY

For many, if not most jobs, quality measures will be applicable. Quality addresses "how well" the task was performed and refers to the accuracy, appearance, or usefulness of the work effort.

Examples of ways to state quality measures include:

- Adheres to standards established by (describe expectation)
- In compliance with specifications
- As measured by customer feedback indicating satisfaction
- Reduced error rate (or rework) by ___%

QUANTITY

Quantity measures assess “how many” or “how much” of something is required to meet the level of performance being described.

Examples of ways to state quantity measures include:

- At least “x” “phone calls” per day
- A minimum of “x” per week/month
- Increases (or decreases) number of ___ by 10%
- Receives no more than 2 grievances per 1000 employees

TIMELINESS

Timeliness measures refer to completion times and are usually expressed as how quickly, when, or by what date an employee produces the work. These are probably the easiest to craft.

Examples of ways to state timeliness measures include:

- Maintains cycle time (e.g., weekly, monthly, quarterly) of _____
- Submits reports on time at end of each quarter
- Meets deadlines by _____
- Talking points are submitted in time for supervisor or higher level official to prepare for critical meetings and policy discussion

One often-used expression is “in a timely manner.” This expression is actually not specific and is open to multiple definitions of what constitutes a timely manner. The manager must define what is meant by timeliness, and it is better to write the defined term into the standard.

COST
EFFECTIVENESS

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. Examples of ways to state cost-effectiveness measures include:

- Maintains or reduces unit expenditures
- Stays within budgets
- Reduces the time it takes to provide X service by ___%
- Spends no more than \$xx per program
- Reduces waste by 10%

MANNER OF
PERFORMANCE

Manner of performance refer to types of behavior employed on the job. Examples of ways to state manner of performance measures include:

- Routinely works collaboratively with _____
- Achieves or demonstrates progress to developing professional

- relationships with _____
- Regularly cooperates with coworkers and others in _____
- Displays understanding, courtesy, tact, and politeness to others _____
- Models appropriate behavior by presenting advice in a positive and helpful manner

**OTHER
CONSIDERATIONS**

A component of successful performance is the consideration of a customer's or employee's perspective. Employee perspective is most often applicable to supervisors. The following describes how these can be considered in establishing performance plans with measurable results. These are a required component of performance plans for senior executives; it is recommended that, as appropriate, they be incorporated into performance plans for supervisors and employees.

CUSTOMER
PERSPECTIVE

Customer perspective measures consider the organization's performance through the eyes of its customers, so that the organization retains a careful focus on customer needs and satisfaction. To do this, it is necessary to determine who the customers are, and what those customers expect from the organization, in the context of the Agency's business purpose and mission.

Customer perspective performance measures should not measure popularity. When factoring customer feedback into the performance rating process, the appraising official makes the rating determination, not the customer.

Support organizations, such as a human resources office, a building services office, or an acquisitions office, also will have goals and measures, but most of the customers of support organizations will likely be employees who work for the same Agency.

Examples of customer perspective measures for various support organizations could include:

- ___% of managers participating in an Agency survey report they receive adequate assistance when they call their human resources office
- ___% of employees asked report they are generally satisfied with the information technology assistance provided in their building

EMPLOYEE
PERSPECTIVE

This is usually applicable only to supervisors. The employee perspective focuses attention on the performance of the key internal processes that drive the organization, including employee development and retention. Accordingly, this is a measurement typically applicable only to supervisors.

The employee perspective factor is not a "popularity contest." Rather, this factor focuses on providing a healthy work environment

for employees, which includes how executives lead and motivate their employees and address development and training needs.

Examples of employee perspective measures often include determining the degree of positive employee response through employee surveys such as:

Employees believe that personnel decisions (e.g., training opportunities, appraisals, awards) made by their supervisor are fair and equitable

- ___% of employees participating in an Agency survey report they received the training they need to perform their job, and over half report their training needs are assessed
- ___% of employees participating in an Agency survey report that awards in their work unit depend on how well employees perform their jobs

TIPS FOR DEVELOPING PERFORMANCE MEASURES

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?
- Is behavior important to the accomplishment of this element?

TIPS FOR WRITING MEASURABLE STANDARDS

- Wording should be *specific*
- The behavior described should be *observable*
- The Fully Successful level should be worded in such a way that the employee can exceed the standard

TIPS FOR EVALUATING MEASURES

Evaluate the tasks using a combination of descriptive and numeric measurements. **Numeric measures** are easy to verify and provide a quantifiable, objective tool. **Descriptive measures** 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 as you evaluate the measures for each task:

- How could quality, quantity, timeliness, cost-effectiveness and/or manner of performance 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 were met?
- What factors would they look for?

**INDICATIONS OF
GOOD
MEASUREMENTS**

- **Specific and objective.** It 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.
- **Mission related.** The measure should directly link to the required performance of the job.
- **Nondiscriminatory.** The measure should be able to be consistently applied to all personnel in the same or similar position or grade with the same authority. Although the elements may be the same for similar positions, the measure should reflect the grade level of the employee.
- **Observable.** You must be realistically able to observe and monitor the performance to ascertain whether the standard has been met.
- **Fully Successful level.** A fully experienced and competent employee will consistently achieve or meet the performance standards for the job given circumstances within his or her control.

WHAT TO AVOID WHEN WRITING RETENTION (Minimally Successful) STANDARDS

By “retention” standard, we mean the standard that describes the level of performance necessary to be retained in a job (i.e., the standard written for performance one level above the Unacceptable level). The retention standard is the Minimally Successful or equivalent standard.

The Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) and the courts have issued many decisions on the topic of valid performance standards. This section highlights what the Board deems to be two major errors to avoid when writing standards. In order to avoid reversal by the MSPB, agencies must ensure that “retention” standards:

- are not impermissibly absolute (i.e., allow for some error)
- inform the employee of the level of performance needed to retain his or her job

AVOID “ABSOLUTE” RETENTION STANDARDS

An “absolute” retention standard—one that allows for no errors—is acceptable only in very limited circumstances. When a single failure to perform under a critical element would result in loss of life, injury, breach of national security, or great monetary loss, an agency can legitimately defend its decision to require perfection from its employees. In other circumstances, the MSPB and the courts usually will find that the agency abused its discretion by establishing retention standards that allow for no margin of error. When writing standards, you should avoid the appearance of requiring perfection at the retention level.

When writing standards—especially retention standards—avoid simply listing tasks without describing the regularity of the occurrence of the task.

Also, because USDA’s appraisal program appraises elements at levels above Fully Successful, the Fully Successful standard itself—as well as the Exceeds Fully Successful standard when an Outstanding or equivalent level is possible—should not be absolute. If it is supposed to be possible to exceed, make sure it is written that way.

To help determine whether you are writing an absolute standard, ask yourself:

- How many times may the employee fail this requirement and still be acceptable?
- Does the retention standard use words such as “all,” “never,” and “each”?
- (These words do not automatically create an absolute standard, but they often alert you to problems.)
- If the retention standard allows for no errors, would it be valid according to the criteria listed above (risk of death, injury, etc.)?

AVOID “BACKWARD” STANDARDS

Case law requires that an employee understand the level of performance needed for retention in the position. When using a Minimally Successful level of performance, a common tendency is to describe it in terms of work that does not get done instead of what must be done to meet that retention standard. Describing negative performance actually describes Unacceptable performance. Standards such as “fails to meet deadlines” or “performs work inaccurately” allow an employee to do virtually no work or to do it poorly and still meet that retention standard. MSPB considers these “backward” retention standards invalid. To help you determine whether you are writing a backward retention standard, ask:

- Does the standard express the level of work the supervisor wants to see or does it describe negative performance? (Example of describing negative performance: Requires assistance more than 50 percent of the time.)
- If the employee did nothing, would he or she meet the standard, as written? (Example: Completes fewer than four products per year.)

For Strategic Alignment Verbiage:

What are the agency's (or programs) specific goals and objectives?

These may be found in the:

- Agency Strategic Plan
- Program Strategic Plan
- Annual Performance Plan
- Customer Service Standards

Example:

Alignment: This Element contributes to the achievement of the Strategic **Human Capital** Goals identified in the USDA **Strategic Human Capital Plan December 2006**, and the **human capital** strategies associated with the **DA** goals as identified in the **DA Strategic Plan 2005 – 2008**. The **DA** goal is as follows – Provides USDA leadership with the administrative tools, services, infrastructure, and policy frameworks to support their public service missions.

{For the strategic alignment section, this needs to have specific information identified, including dates of strategic plans, specific items listed, etc. }

The following pages are outlined in the format depicted below. The **Performance Element** is displayed within a box, and examples of standards are outlined in bullet format below the box outline. Measure descriptions are underlined within the standards presented.

Performance Element

Standards Examples

- Example One
- Example Two
- Example Three
- Example Four

**Execution of Duties or
Business Results or
Mission Results or
Program Management or
Project Management or
Office Management**

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.

Other options for consideration:

- Demonstrates a basic understanding of mission and organizational goals and priorities. Assignments are completed in accordance with applicable Agency regulations, policies, procedures, and guidelines. Work products are responsive to the supervisor's and the organization's stated priorities and requirements.
- Supports achievement of program strategic goals and initiatives within assigned functional areas of responsibility and contributes to the overall accomplishment of "DA" and "OHCM" strategic objectives. Develops, implements, and evaluates initiatives in assigned programs.
- Demonstrates a commitment and personal responsibility to strive for excellence in the accomplishment of work assignments that are aligned with and ultimately contribute to the achievement of the Agency's mission and goals.

- Handles multiple tasks simultaneously, prioritizing and completing assignments within established deadlines with not more than 3-5 exceptions. Tracks assigned projects, correspondence, etc., from initiation to completion and addresses each within the timeframes prescribed by the supervisor.
- Meets projected deadlines and quality expectation on assigned projects 85% of the time, including the issuance of policy and guidance, etc., and responses to requests from XX and XX, to ensure outcomes meet planned objectives.
- Prepares correspondence, memoranda, briefing papers, etc., that are timely, clear, accurate, thorough, and appropriately written and formatted. Documents have less than 2 errors 95% of the time.
- Prepares reports [insert examples] that are accurate and completed within established timeframes with no more than 1-3 exceptions.

Mission Support or Execution of Duties or Mission Results or Program Management or Project Management (Continued)

- Provides technical oversight for assigned programs, and works to continually evaluate and improve them from a programmatic and cost-effective perspective. Achieves or demonstrates progress in improving program and work practices, including minimizing the complexity of processes whenever possible.
- Recommendations and contributions are accepted 80% of the time or more often because they are based on demonstrated sound judgment and analyses, cost effectiveness, and sensitivity to the effects on overall policy. Such recommendations range from strategic approaches to very broad problems to tactical solutions impacting individual program or operational issues.
- Provides timely and reliable technical advice and assistance to internal and external customers on {specify} matters with not more than 3-4 exceptions. Advice is based on good knowledge and proper application of Federal regulations, precedent cases, and relationships among interested parties. (Note – this standard could also be within a Customer Service element.)
- Feedback from customers indicates satisfaction on 2 out of 3 occasions.
- Safeguards and protects the personally identifiable information of all employees' contractors, or the general public from unauthorized disclosure with no more than 1 -2 exceptions.
- 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.
- Works collaboratively with customers to review issues impacting functional areas and identify effective strategies to improve outcomes. Informs customers of the status of relevant work issues with not more than 3-4 exceptions.
- Achieves or demonstrates progress to developing and maintaining professional relationships with all stakeholders both internal and external that advance AGENCY/DEPARTMENT/DIVISION interests and promote collaboration, two-way communication, teamwork and results.
- Participates in a majority of AGENCY/DIVISION meetings, activities, and initiatives, as required.

Execution of Duties or Mission Results or Program Management or Project Management or Office Management (Continued)

- Continuously keeps supervisor informed regarding sensitive issues or controversial emerging issues and offers well thought-out recommendations to prevent and/or respond to developing problems with no more than 1-3 exceptions.
- 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, meetings, etc.
- Continuously gains useful information from XXX or other organizations within the Agency on the impact of policies and processes affecting the program.
- Holds meetings and/or teleconferences, as appropriate, with customers and/or agency contacts to promote services, share information and to remain abreast of USDA developments.
- Meets Federal contracting regulations with respect to processing, follow through, and life span with no more than 3 exceptions

Specific Examples Tailored to Specific Work Requirements:

- 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 90% of the time.
- Provides timeline (initial feedback within one business day of request) and accurate feedback and guidance to customer requests.
- Files notices and amendments within 2 days of posted receipt.
- Ensures applications are completed accurately 97% of the time in order to minimize inaccurate payments.
- Loads software within 2 days of receipt 95% of the time.
- Completes all actions required on an application within established timeframes or goals 95% of the time.
- In accordance with USDA policy, deposits and processes payments within 24 hours of receipt.
- Achieves or demonstrates progress toward ensuring that no improper payments are issued.
- ***Supervisors must include established timeframes, dates, numbers, and percentages where required.**

Program or Project Management. Supports achievement of program strategic goals and initiates within assigned functional areas of responsibility and contributes to the overall accomplishment of XXX and XXX strategic objectives. Develops, implements, and evaluates initiatives in assigned programs. 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.

- Routinely reviews new and existing laws, regulations, and OPM and USDA policy and guidance to determine needed changes/modifications and makes appropriate recommendations.
- Develops new and modifies existed USDA policies and procedures when necessary, and consistently provides clear and accurate information to the supervisor and senior management to obtain necessary approvals.
- When necessary, solicits active participation from or provides information to USDA work groups concerned with _____
- Routinely develops and implements plans to achieve program objectives and assess/improve work products, services and processes, and demonstrates measureable results in program accomplishment and improvement.
- When necessary, performs appropriate research on assigned projects.
- Maintains regular contact with XXX and advises the USDA program contacts with updated guidance. Comprehensive guidance is provided on a routine basis through a variety of communications methods including briefings, meetings, teleconferences, emails, training sessions, etc., for technical and administrative purposes.
- Processes program documents within the unit's established goals with no more than 3 exceptions.
- Ensures that reviews are conducted and reports are filed and submitted within established timeframes.
- Achieves or makes progress towards delinquency rates within the XX' established goals.

Program or Project Management (continued)

- Ensures that staff is fully trained in the program areas for which each employee is responsible.
- Ensures that financial payments are made within 30 days of authorization.
- Successfully completed the XXX projects as project/team lead. (List projects with measures).

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

Communication. 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.

- Communicates clearly with internal and external stakeholders and shares accurate information 90% of the time.
- Responds to general questions within 24 hours with no more than 6-8 exceptions. Elevates more complex questions to supervisor, team leader, or other individual responsible within 24 hours of inquiry.
- Prepares written documents and/or presentation materials that are clear, concise, and understandable; as well as following prescribed procedures and within established timeframes with no more than 3 exceptions.
- Written products or presentations follow plain English principles, including logical organization, description sections headings, simple terms and good use of tables, list, graphics and spaces 90% of the time.
- Draft written products are completed and submitted for review by the date agreed to at initial assignment. Revisions are consistently completed and returned within the agreed-upon time frame.
- Prepares documents that are clear, concise and understandable as well as following prescribed procedures and within establish timeframes with not more than 3 exceptions.
- Responds in writing (when appropriate) to customer inquiries within established timeframes with no more than 3 exceptions.
- Regularly shares program/project 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.
- Provides advice and guidance consistent with appropriate guidelines in a coherent, articulate, positive, helpful manner that results in thorough communication and understanding of relevant issues between the incumbent and the customer with no more than 7-8 exceptions.

Communication (continued)

- Submits draft written products for review by the assigned deadlines, makes revisions within the established timeframes with no more than 3 exceptions. (this standard could also be found within Mission Support)
- Resolves disputes and problems with others through the use of problem solving, conflict resolution, and negotiation techniques. Provides suggestions on how best to use information and insights to improve programs and procedures.
- The overall audience rating of a presentation given is at least acceptable. When audience feedback was not available, employee generally demonstrated that information was clear, concise and well-organized, elicited comments from participants, showed respect toward participants, kept discussion on track, responded to issues at hand minimizing extraneous information and was able to answer most questions, and invited additional questions to ensure understanding of subject matter.
- Schedules and holds staff meetings on a regular basis (at least monthly and after major program conferences and meetings or more often if required by management). **(S)**

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

**** (S) identifies objectives as supervisor only.**

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.

- 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.
- Continuously identifies and pursues opportunities to improve services or products.
- Demonstrates collaborative efforts between XXX and XXX by ensuring team regularly shares information and provides other support. Joint staff meetings are held on a regular basis as established by management.

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.

- Regularly cooperates with coworkers and others in meeting commitments and accomplishing assigned work on time; e.g., sharing information freely.
- Fosters productive and cooperative working relationships by showing understanding, courtesy, tact, and politeness to others with no more than 6-8 valid complaints.
- Demonstrates collaborative efforts between XXX and XXX by regularly sharing information and providing other support. Attends and participates in joint staff meetings with no more than 2 exceptions.
- Responds constructively to feedback, seeking ways to improve. Consistently raises concerns in a constructive manner and offers potential solutions.
- 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.**

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

- Asks questions for clarification and makes suggestions for implementation within the timeframes established by management.
- 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.
- Writes documents required by the supervisor that are clear, concise, and understandable within established timeframes 95% of the time.
- Written documents are considered of average professional quality, are infrequently returned for substantial revision for content, and usually fully analyze relevant legal and policy issues.
- Assembles, indexes, and organizes work papers to expedite analysis and develop quality summaries and report segments with no more than 3 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.
- Reviews and analyzes 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.
- 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.**

Resource Management. Monitors allocated resources, including people, time, technology, facilities, contracts and funds. Maintains complete and accurate records of expenditures and utilization of resources. 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. Introduces and manages technology solutions when cost effective to do so.

- Manages within established budget for program, function, or work assigned; notifies appropriate individual of potential budget shortfalls at least 60 days in advance.
- Effectively manages human, financial, information and physical resources. Shifts available resources to accomplish changing priorities, when necessary.
- Plans projects or other assignments, monitors, and completes within schedule and quality goals 90% of the time.
- Cost estimates are sufficiently detailed, with back-up documentation. Managed within established budget for program, function, or work assigned.
- Ensures that travel, training, and other administrative forms are properly completed, timely, and followed-up to ensure proper processing 95% of the time.
- Plans resource needs accurately 90% of the time.
- Ensures that payments are processed within timeframes with no more than 1-3 exceptions.
- Ensures bills are paid accurately so that payments do not incur additional charges 95% of the time.
- Ensures that budget object codes are correctly entered 97% of the time.

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

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 effective working relationships with all stakeholders both internal and external to USDA as required. These relationships are critical to promoting XXX's program and supporting accomplishment of USDA and XX strategic goals. 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.

- Models appropriate behavior by presenting advice and guidance in a positive and helpful manner, including appropriate options, recommendations, and results, with no more than 6-8 valid complaints. Advice and guidance is complete, timely, and consistent with appropriate guidelines 80% of the time.
- Routinely responds to each customer request with the most accurate and complete information available. If information to a telephone call cannot be provided immediately, answers are usually provided within 2 work days of receipt of the call. Email responses are usually answered within 2 work days.
- 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.
- Ensures external customers are acknowledged within 3 minutes of the time they enter the office with no more than 10 exceptions.
- Ensures that XXX are accurate and processed within established timeframes with no more than 1-3 exceptions.
- Responds to other agencies and offices regarding XXX within established timeframes with no more than 1-5 exceptions.
- Provides internal training that is accurate and given within established timeframes 90% of the time.
- Receives no more than 6-8 valid customer complaints.

Customer Service (Continued)

- Investigates and addresses customers concerns and complaints within 3 working days.
- Feedback from customers indicates they are generally satisfied with **answers to questions, proposed solutions and suggestions, or** recommendations are understandable.
- Makes improvement on customer satisfaction measures compared to previous data¹ (comment/feedback cards, customer survey, random customer calls, direct observations, etc.).

PII Information

- Demonstrates a basic understanding of Personally Identifiable Information and appropriate safeguards. Complies with Personally Identifiable Information rules and regulations that apply to all employees.
- Regularly safeguards and protects the personally identifiable information of all employees, contractors, or the general public from unauthorized disclosure.
- Ensures all reports of PII loss are reported to a supervisor or designated official within 48 hours.

***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.

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. Collaborates effectively with customers and stakeholders to advance EEO/CR objectives within assigned areas of responsibility.

**The element can be standalone; or the language included in another element.*

- Models appropriate behavior by treat customers, colleagues, employees, and other internal and external stakeholders with respect, courtesy, politeness and sensitivity with no more than 6-8 valid complaints.
- Consistently treats coworkers with respect, fairness, and politeness including socially disadvantaged, females and persons with disabilities. Relates well to people from various backgrounds and situations.
- Consistently treats customers with respect, fairness, and politeness including socially disadvantaged, females and persons with disabilities.
- Brings discriminatory issues or actions to the attention of the supervisor or other appropriate official as soon as possible but no later than 48 hours after the occurrence.
- Remains familiar with EEO/CR laws, regulations and policies to ensure adherence to requirements.
- Completes annual EEO/CR training, as required, within established time frames.

Safety and Health. Adheres to Safety and Occupational Health practices and procedures in order to promote and maintain a safe and healthful work environment for all employees.

**The element can be standalone; or the language included in another element.*

- 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 a supervisor or designated official within 48 hours.

ELEMENTS FOR SUPERVISORS

Supervision or Leadership/Management/Supervision

(A mandatory element for all supervisors and managers with suggested language).

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.

- Prioritizes work of staff to deal with workload shifts and to ensure mission-critical work is accomplished with 95% accuracy.
- Schedules staff meetings at least monthly and after major program conferences or meetings or more frequently if required by management.
- Ensures that all new employees receive training on operational and procedural requirements within timeframes required by management.
- Ensures that all employees are assessed and training needs are identified, communicated to employees, and planned on an annual basis. Ensures that all employees receive required training within established guidelines.
- Ensures issues and problems are identified, documented, and dealt with in a timely manner (immediately for minor issues, usually within one week for others, or within Agency established timeframes as applicable) 90% of the time.
- Ensures fair treatment of staff by dealing with issues such as absenteeism, tardiness, and other chronic problems within one week of identification of problem.
- Prepares required reports that are accurate, according to stated requirements, and within established timeframes 97% of the time.
- Ensures all personnel responsibilities (recruitment, staffing, promotion, training, evaluation and discipline) are conducted fairly, meet established procedures, and within established timeframes 90% of the time.

Supervision (Continued)

- Acts on recruitment actions within the 45 day hiring goal time line.
- Routinely models appropriate leadership and professional behavior by _____ (treating others with respect, directing and motivating staff, maintaining confidentiality, etc.)

For Employee Perspective:

- Seeks employee feedback to identify needs and expectations and considers employee perspective when making decisions affecting employees to develop a well-informed staff who are effective and efficient implementers of management decisions.
- Considers the employee perspective when planning employee development and training goals/requirements and internal standard operating procedures. Encourages employees to participate in the annual human capital survey to assist the agency in measuring its' success in improving its performance goals and objectives.
- Feedback from staff indicates that they understand the agency's direction, the goals and their role in achieving these goals; understand what is expected of them; were involved in developing their performance plans; understand how well they are performing and where they need to improve; have performance plans that accurately reflect their performance measures; have the necessary tools and resources to accomplish their work; where they do not have what they need, they understand why; have the skills and knowledge they need to do their jobs, or a plan to obtain them; are acknowledged and appreciated for good performance.

Additional examples from other agencies shared by the Office of Personnel Management:

- Analyzed feedback received from employees from the Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS)/the Annual Employee Survey (AES) or other feedback mechanisms (focus groups/ 1-on 1 discussions) and develops action plans to improve future survey results/employee satisfaction.
- Implement action plan to ensure the agency is rated in the top 50% of agencies surveyed in the 2006 Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS) and in the top five agencies in the 2008 FHCS. Obtain employee feedback that indicates the plan is working.

Supervision (Continued)

- Takes into account employee perspective and encourages employees to develop creative and effective ways to successfully accomplish the organization's goals and objectives.
- Proactively seeks and listens to employees and objectively considers others' ideas and opinions, even when they are in conflict with one's own.

For Customer Perspective

- States/stakeholders are engaged in program priorities; problems and issues of mutual concern are identified and resolved collaboratively. Key messages and information are communicated effectively to States, other stakeholders, and the public through statements to the press, promotional events, and other strategies as applicable. Engages in dialog with advocates and public interest groups in the region to further agency goals and priorities and to hear and respond to issues that may be raised.
- Internal and external stakeholder needs and expectations are considered in making decisions, devising solutions, and resolving conflicts. Those consistent with corporate priorities are included in plans and commitments, and are monitored for success in achieving satisfactory results.
- Feedback from customers indicate satisfaction with the quality of service delivered, including that the service was provided in a collaborative manner and met the customers' needs; and the quantity and quality of information delivered, including that the information provided increased the customers' understanding of the agency's programs.
- Feedback from customers indicate that you demonstrated active listening to understand their needs; provided services/solutions that addressed their needs; worked collaboratively with them to address their needs; provided assistance when needed and the assistance provided was useful to them/made them more productive; handled interaction professionally; and maintained a positive working relationship by communicating and support agency goals, priorities, and positions to support accomplishment of agency mission and goals.

Additional examples from other agencies shared by the Office of Personnel Management:

- Ensure 95% of customer requests are filled within timeframes and with less than 5% error. Proactively seeks and listens to customer and employees and objectively considers others' ideas and opinions, even when they are in conflict with one's own.
- Proactively respond to customer and workforce feedback and take appropriate actions to resolve concerns and issues within 30 days of receipt to maximize effectiveness.
- Drive a customer-centric attitude through the DCMA-IT, by 11/30/07 reduce the average time Help Desk trouble tickets are open by 7%, as measured by the automated Help Desk ticketing system.
- Satisfies customer needs through quality products and responsive service. The customer survey responses are excellent or good at least 65% of the time. Results are tracked monthly on the balances scorecard reviewed by the Agency Director.

For Performance Management

- Ensures that all individual performance plans are linked to the unit Director of supervisor's goals and that the links are explained to employees by the required deadline.
- Develop performance plans for all supervised employees that include a critical element with standards that identify clear and measurable (quality, quantity, cost, and/or timely) tasks and results that are aligned to organizational goals for each individual by the required deadline.
- Conducts all requirements of the performance management cycle including encouraging two-way discussion of planning, reviews, evaluation, and career development, setting goals and conducting reviews and evaluations within established timeframes, encouraging and implementing on-going feedback throughout the year, 99% of the time.
- Communicates how organizational goals are linked and cascaded to individual and work group performance, and how the accomplishments support employees' organizational goals within their organizations, through staff meetings, individual or team meetings, and electronic and internal correspondence initially and then via staff meetings, email, etc. throughout the rating period.
- Ensures that all employees review the Agency's current Strategic Plan Framework or organizational goals with no more than 3-5 exceptions.

- Has an employee performance plan that focus on results achieved, contains at least one element that is aligned with organizational goals, and are in place normally 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 normally issued within 30 calendar days of the end of the appraisal period

***Note:** When cascading goals, be sure to consider the level of responsibility of the position. For example, do not use the same language for a program technician that would be used for the staff's Division Director. Standards must be realistic and attainable.*

Safety and Health – Supervisory Plans

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.

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

Supervisory Equal Employment Opportunity and Civil Rights.

(This is a mandatory element for all supervisors and managers with suggested language.)

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. Consistently demonstrates commitment and adherence to Civil Rights/Equal Employment Opportunity (CR/EEO) laws, regulations and policy. Demonstrates awareness of EO/OCR policies and responsibilities of Agency and departmental goals of working to employ and develop a diverse, yet unified workforce.

- Models appropriate behavior by treating employees, peers, supervisors, and customers with respect, fairness, and politeness with no more than 6-8 valid complaints.
- Ensures that employees receive required Civil Rights, EEO, and Sexual Harassment training within established timeframes. And/Or Provides Civil Rights/EEO/Sexual Harassment/Diversity information (USDA material) to employees through information sessions, staff meetings, etc. at least 2 times a year.
- Responds to issues/actions/allegations according to Agency procedures and within established timeframes with no more than 3 approved exceptions.
- Takes action to reduce the number of valid employee complaints by actions such as increasing information provided for interpersonal skills training to employees, etc. at least 2 times annually.
- Reviews the USDA's Civil Rights Policy with employees at least once per year to ensure that customers and employees are treated in accordance with the policy.
- Encourages employees to attend training to increase interpersonal skills; e.g., cross-cultural communication, negotiation, dispute resolution, problem solving, active listening, etc.
- Provides pro-active assistance to employees to help with problem solving and resolving conflicts. Results based on employee feedback or surveys, random oral surveys from second level supervisor, providing employee skills training in related topics.
- Meets USDA established Civil Rights/EEO goals for recruitment, selection, promotion, training, awards, and other personnel activities.

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