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**SUBJECT:** NASS Performance Appraisal Program

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**EFFECTIVE:** April 5, 2005

**EXPIRES:** September 30, 2008

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**FOR ACTION BY:** State Statistical Offices and Headquarters Units

**REFERENCE:** REE Policy and Procedure, 435.2-NASS

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**Approved by:** \_\_\_\_\_

Associate Administrator

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- I. **PURPOSE:** Performance appraisal is a management tool designed to encourage communications in the office, improve the quality of work produced, and promote individual accountability. These are the concepts underpinning the legal requirement that all agencies evaluate employee performance.

The REE Policy and Procedure (P&P), 435.2-NASS, NASS Performance Appraisal Program, should be used by all supervisors and employees in implementing and executing the program. This Policy and Standards Memorandum (PSM) highlights these policies and procedures and includes some additional information supervisors should use in implementing this new appraisal program for NASS employees. This system replaces the current 2-level appraisal program previously implemented in 1997, which will end upon implementation of this new program. Those in the Senior Executive Service are covered under a separate performance program and are excluded from this program.

- II. **BACKGROUND:** As of January 1, 2005, NASS supervisors and employees updated their current performance plans to include a statement that aligned them with the Agency's strategic goals and objectives. This was the first step in cascading NASS organizational goals to individual performance. This is being driven by OPM and the Department who are emphasizing the development of performance plans that are results focused or that measure expectations in terms of expected results. The Department is currently being scored on this by OMB under the Presidential Management Agenda.

The next step is to implement a more "results focused" evaluation process by implementing a new performance appraisal program to achieve this goal. Each individual's performance must include "specific goals, tasks, projects, improvements, initiatives, efficiencies, or results" that need to be completed during the rating cycle, with reasonable deadlines for doing so. These need to be outlined and aligned with NASS's long-range strategic plan. Each employee will work with their supervisor to identify the appropriate goals and measurable outcomes that support and contribute to the Agency's overall performance.

III. COVERAGE: This program covers NASS employees who are reasonably expected to be employed for more than 90 days. Excluded from coverage are those employees expected to be employed less than 90 days; those employed as trainees under a work-study appointments or under temporary appointments; those in long term training programs and those members of the Senior Executive Service. Refer to the P&P for additional details.

IV. NASS PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL PERIOD: Supervisors will formally evaluate covered employees once every 12 months. The normal appraisal rating period begins October 1 and ends September 30 the following year (or the date when an employee starts a new job until September 30). The new performance appraisal program should be implemented on or about March 1, 2005.

Appraisal periods must be at least 90 days in length in order for employees to be rated. When the rating year ends before an employee has had performance standards in place for the minimum appraisal period of 90 days, the supervisor will normally extend the appraisal period for the length of time needed to meet the 90-day requirement. When the new target date is reached, the supervisor will prepare a rating of record for the employee.

V. ESTABLISHING AND COMMUNICATING PERFORMANCE PLANS: Upon an employee's assignment to a position and at the beginning of the appraisal period thereafter, (normally within 30 days), the rating official will meet with the employee to establish and discuss a written performance plan (elements and standards). If one or more major duties and/or responsibilities of a position change, the performance plan should be reviewed to determine if it needs to be changed. Changes to performance plans must be in writing and must be approved by the rating and reviewing official prior to implementation. Supervisors must complete an interim performance appraisal for employees who are transferred to a different position during the rating year. This advisory rating will be sent to the employee's new supervisor who should use it in evaluating the employee's performance for the entire year. Refer to Section 6 of the P&P, 435.2-NASS for more details on the responsibilities of the rating and reviewing officials and Section 10 for additional guidance for supervisors on advisory ratings and special situations.

VI. GENERIC PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS AND STANDARDS: Performance elements describe what the employee is expected to do. NASS has established 5 generic elements and standards for both supervisors and employees of which 3 are critical and 2 are non-critical. The following table outlines the generic elements and their determination of critical and non-critical.

Supervisory Elements	Non-supervisory Elements	Weight
Leadership, Supervision, and Project Management	Teamwork, EO/CR and Project Management	Critical
Mission Results and Goal Accomplishment	Mission Results and Goal Accomplishment	Critical
Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights	Technical and Analytical Performance	Critical
Customer Service and Communications	Customer Service and Communications	Non-critical
Initiative and Innovation	Initiative and Innovation	Non-critical

The first critical element for supervisors is Leadership, Supervision, and Project Management. For non-supervisors, the first critical element is Teamwork, Equal Opportunity/Civil Rights (EO/CR) and Project Management. A second critical element for both supervisors and non-supervisors will be for demonstrating support for Mission Results and Goal Accomplishment. This relates to completing work goals aligned with the NASS/REE/USDA strategic goals and the NASS Agency Goals. The third critical element is EO/CR principles for supervisors, and Technical and Analytical Performance for non-supervisors. The last two elements, with noncritical weights for all employees, includes a Customer Service and Communication element and an element for evaluating an employee's Initiative and Innovation. All employees are responsible for showing initiative and innovation or adaptability that adds value to their work assignments without constant supervision.

The Mission Results and Goal Accomplishment element is key to linking and aligning Agency goals to individual performance. The NASS FY Goals document has been developed for this specific purpose and will be updated and maintained by Headquarters. Goals must be included in the employee's performance plan for this particular element and they must come from this document in order to show the how the individual's performance contributes to the success of the Agency's overall performance. Performance measures associated with each goal will be negotiated between the supervisor and employee, unless otherwise dictated by State and National performance targets (or other measurement processes) established by Headquarters. State and National performance measures and targets will be updated annually, normally, at the beginning of the rating year. A process for updating and maintaining the goals document will be posted on the NASSnet.

Office goals and performance measures can be developed and included in the other 4 performance elements, as deemed necessary by the supervisor. The NASS FY Goals can be used for these elements, as needed.

A critical element is defined as an assignment or responsibility of such importance that receiving an unacceptable performance in that element would result in an overall unacceptable rating and definitive remedial action must be taken. A non-critical element is defined as an aspect of individual, team, or organizational performance exclusive of a critical element, that

is used to assign a summary level. Unlike the critical element, receiving an unacceptable performance for a non-critical element will not result in an overall minimally acceptable rating. The supervisor should work closely with the employee to assist them in improving their performance, especially for any element that is rated Does Not Meet Fully Successful. Refer to the Section 10 of the P&P, Assisting Employees in Improving Performance.

A performance standard is a measure to tell the employee how well they have to perform/accomplish their work to meet a desired level of performance. NASS performance standards are only defined at the Fully Successful level.

Additional factors to consider in determining the rating for each element:

- Assessment of the employee's actual contribution to the teamwork required to meet the Department's and/or agency mission, strategic goals, and management initiatives;
- Setting and achieving professional, team, and project goals that promote growth and career development;
- Satisfaction given to both internal and external customers and promoting the principles of the NASS core values;
- (Supervisors) Effectiveness, productivity, and performance of the employees for whom a manager is responsible; and, recognition given employees based on performance;
- Personal initiative and drive to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the Agency; and,
- Commitment to affirmative action, equal employment opportunity, diversity, and the merit system principles set forth under Section 2301 of Title 5, United States Code.

NASS has established generic performance plans for certain NASS positions. In unusual cases, plans maybe tailored to reflect specific responsibilities unique to the unit or position. Deviating from the generic plans requires approval by the Associate Deputy Administrator or Division Director. Refer to Section 7 of the P&P, 435.2-NASS for more details on performance elements and standards.

- VII. PROGRESS REVIEWS: Supervisors should provide feedback to employees throughout the year on their performance and performance-related issues. It is required for supervisors to perform at least one progress review during the appraisal period, usually at the midpoint of the rating year in March and/or April. Refer to Section 8 of the P&P, 435.2-NASS for more details on progress reviews.
- VIII. ANNUAL APPRAISAL PROCESS: Near the end of the appraisal period, each employee must provide a 1-2 page accomplishment report to their supervisor that documents specific accomplishments made during the year. The supervisor will use this report as an important component in determining an employee's rating of record and should be referred to during the performance discussion with the employee. An employee must be appraised on each element in the performance plan unless the employee has had insufficient opportunity to demonstrate performance in the element. Attachment I outlines a suggested format for documenting accomplishments. The Employee Performance Accomplishment Report (NASS-435C), a standard report form can be used for reporting accomplishments. This form has been posted on the NASSnet and can be downloaded using this link: ([NASS-435C form](#)).

The supervisor will evaluate each performance element and determine which of the following three rating levels is most appropriate when comparing the employee's performance with the Fully Successful performance standard established for that element. The rating levels are:

- **Exceeds Fully Successful:** This level generally describes performance that exceeds the Fully Successful standard for the element being evaluated. Employees performing at this level may display initiative, ownership, and/or unusual independence.
- **Meets Fully Successful:** This level generally describes the performance of the solid, effective employee whose work meets normal expectations in terms of quantity, quality, timeliness, and customer service, as outlined in the Fully Successful standard.
- **Does Not Meet Fully Successful:** This level describes performance that has failed to fulfill the basic expectation for the work. With assistance from the Human Resources Division, the rating official must prepare a written statement describing the employee's deficiencies for all elements rated at this level. Early identification and correction of poor performance is strongly recommended.

A five summary rating system summarizes the employees overall performance and is calculated using the Decision Table on the NASS-435P form using a weighting system that is built into the calculation. Critical elements have a weight of "2" and non-critical elements have a weight of "1". The summary levels are:

- **Outstanding:** All appraisal units for critical and non-critical elements were earned at the Exceeds Fully Successful level. For each Outstanding rating, the rating official must prepare a written justification outlining the employee's accomplishments or provide a copy of the employee's complete accomplishment report and submit it with the NASS 435P.
- **Superior:** More appraisal units for critical and non-critical elements were earned at the Exceeds Fully Successful level than at the Meets Fully Successful level. None of the elements were rated Does Not Meet Fully Successful.
- **Fully Successful:** As many or more appraisal units for critical and non-critical elements were earned at the Meets Fully Successful level than at the Exceeds Fully Successful level. None of the critical elements were rated Does Not Meet Fully Successful.
- **Minimally Acceptable:** More appraisal units (for non-critical elements only) were earned at the Does Not Meet Fully Successful level than at the Exceeds Fully Successful level, and no critical element was rated Does Not Meet Fully Successful.
- **Unacceptable:** One or more critical elements were rated Does Not Meet Fully Successful. Should this occur, the supervisor must contact their Employee Relations Specialist for guidance.

Once a summary rating has been established by the supervisor, the supervisor will sign the form and forward it to the reviewing official for discussion and approval. It is important that this review take place before the employee sees the rating or is engaged in any

discussion concerning the rating. After the reviewing official and approving official have signed the form, the supervisor will discuss the rating with the employee. Refer to Section 9 of the P&P, 435.2-NASS for more details on the annual appraisal process, rating, and summary levels. Guidelines for assisting employees in improving performance and handling special situations and employee dissatisfactions are documented in Section 10 of the P&P, 435.2-NASS.

- IX. PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK FORM 435F: The performance feedback form is an optional administrative form to be completed by supervisors for each employee for the interim rating and at the end of the rating year. However, it can be used as often during the year as needed. It is a tool designed to aid in the rating process, and is intended to foster “open” and honest discussion of the employee’s performance during the performance appraisal. Copies of the form(s) are maintained in the supervisor’s files. This form has been posted on the NASSnet and can be downloaded using this link: ([NASS-435F form](#)).

Each factor rated will use a continuous scale from low to high. Other factors, such as meets or exceeds job requirements, amount of supervision required, and willingness to take on additional responsibilities in relation to performance against job duties and responsibilities, should also be considered.

- X. RECOGNIZING PERFORMANCE: With the implementation of the new performance appraisal program, employee recognition is twofold. Annual performance awards (bonus) will be added to the employee recognition process. Performance awards are based on the end-of-year rating of record. The Awards for Excellence Program will continue. This program recognize individuals for their accomplishments and contributions to the Agency.

An annual performance bonus will be distributed to employees at the end of the rating year for those receiving a performance rating of outstanding, superior, or fully successful with 2 or more appraisal units at Exceed Fully Successful and none at Does Not Meet Fully Successful. Award amounts will be established each year, as determined by the Administrator. The process for reviewing and administering the performance awards will be announced in a separate instruction prior to the end of each rating period. Refer to A-7-05 Performance Recognition in NASS for additional details on recognition and awards.

- XI. FORMS AND PROCESSING: Electronic versions of all of the forms are posted on the NASSnet and can be downloaded from this link ([Performance Homepage](#)). Examples of appraisal forms NASS-435P, AD-435A, and AD-435B are also included in the P&P.

The appraisal form, NASS-435P, is the summary performance rating form. The NASS 435P, the AD-435A/B, the accomplishments report (NASS-435C) or other written justification for “outstanding” and/or the written justification for “unacceptable” performance must be submitted. All other documentation should be retained in the

supervisor's file. After review of AD-435P, it will be sent to NASS Budget Administrative Service Office (BASO) who will then forward it to the office of Administration and Financial Management (AFM), Human Resources Division (HRD) who will input the information in a NFC database and file a copy in the official Employee Performance Folder. A signed hard copy of the NASS 435P must also be retained by the immediate supervisor and the employee.

Forms AD-435A and AD-435B will be used to certify the establishment of the employee's performance plan. It should be signed and dated upon development and initialed and dated upon progress review. The Performance Feedback form, Form 435F, is optional and should be used for the interim and final appraisal discussions for covered employees. A copy is filed in the supervisor 's files and one copy is given to the employee.

#### ATTACHMENT I: Preparing Accomplishment Reports

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## **Preparing Accomplishment Reports**

### ***Why Prepare Accomplishment Reports?***

- Serves as a reminder to both the employee and supervisor of individual accomplishments during a performance cycle
- Used to develop and support performance appraisals
- Leads to a more objective, effective appraisal of performance

### ***How Are They Written?***

- Limit to 2 pages, if possible
- Arrange by performance element
- Describe the accomplishment
- Describe the impact, result or outcome of accomplishment
  - o Did it enhance a work process?
  - o Did it have an impact on a customer?
  - o Did it help the organization achieve its goals?
- Use performance plan as a guide – address standards
- Use “I” statements
- Use action verbs that describe the specific role in accomplishment
- Refer to activity/status reports, calendars, previous accomplishment reports, etc.
- Avoid laundry lists
- Follow your organization’s policy (some require a description of how the standard is exceeded)
- Proof read your report