

Human Resource Basics

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Performance standards are established for each position in FSIS. There are a set of standards for most in-plant positions.

The supervisor receives the performance standards and appraisal form from the Human Resources Field Office when a new employee is hired; and then, annually thereafter. A new employee signs their performance standards upon hiring, and annually thereafter.

The supervisor and the employee meet to discuss performance elements and standards and to set performance goals. Ongoing communication is maintained with at least one progress review midway in the rating cycle.

FSIS has a 5-Level Rating System:

- Outstanding
- Superior
- Fully Successful
- Marginal
- Unacceptable

The supervisor meets with the employee, and discusses the employee's performance with regard to each element in the performance standards at both the mid-year and annual reviews. Monetary and non-monetary awards are available for high performers (Coordinate awards with the frontline supervisor).

Supervisors are only obligated to advise an employee when his/her performance drops below the fully successful level. When an employee's performance is dropping below the fully successful level, contact the Labor and Employee Relations Division for assistance in:

- Monitoring the employee's performance; and
- Placing the employee in a Performance Improvement Plan (usually for 60-90 days); at the end of which the employee improve, is removed, or is demoted.

PROBATIONARY EMPLOYEES

All new Federal employee hires are subject to a one-year probationary period. If a new employee is not performing well, the supervisor needs to address the problem well before the one year period expires. Contact the Labor and Employee Relations Division for assistance at least 90 days before the expiration of the probationary period. While "just cause" is required to terminate a probationary employee, the purpose of this one-year period is to permit the Federal government to weed out employees not suitable for continued Federal employment. Similarly, if a probationary employee exhibits conduct problems the supervisor should immediately contact the Labor and Employee Relations Division.

OFFICIAL PERSONNEL FILE

OPF is the common acronym for “Official Personnel Folder”. “The “OPF” is the official repository of records and reports of personnel actions affected during an employee’s civilian government service, and documents and papers required in connection with such actions”. Examples of documents contained in your OPF are the SF-50’s indicating cost-of-living and within-grade pay increases, your election or non-election form for the Federal life insurance program, SF-52’s indicating selections for promotions, details, or lateral assignments, your health insurance form, beneficiary forms for such things as your life insurance and TSP funds, and other related documents.

Your OPF is established when you first become employed with the Federal government. In FSIS, field employee OPF is physically located in the Human Resources Field Office, Minneapolis, MN. Your OPF follows you throughout your career with the Federal government. When you are not employed by a Federal Agency your OPF is kept at the National Personnel Records Center. OPF is subject to the Privacy Act. An employee and her/his supervisor can review it; however, others must have the written permission of the employee to review the file.

THE GENERAL SCHEDULE

(GS) PAY SCALE

Most Federal employees are hired at a specified General Schedule (GS) level, or “Grade” Level. There are 15 Grade Levels (GS-1 through GS-15). There are 10 steps within each GS Grade Level. Cost of Living Allowances (COLA) increases to the GS Pay Scale are determined annually by Congress, and the President.

GS PAY SCALE AND LOCALITY PAY

Certain cities and metropolitan areas with a high cost-of-living are given a larger annual increase, called a “locality pay” differential.

E.g., an employee in Los Angeles, a high cost-of-living city, would receive a slightly higher annual pay rate than an employee in a city with a standard cost-of-living; such as, Jacksonville, FL.

OPM’s website contains listings of the various locality pay rates of high cost-of-living cities, and areas in the U.S. (See www.opm.gov)

WITHIN GRADE INCREASES

Within Grade Increases (WGI) are regularly occurring pay increases given to General Schedule (GS) employees in Grades 1-15. 90 days prior to a WGI being due, the supervisor will receive Form AD-658 from the Human Resources Field inquiring if an employee’s performance is at least at the Fully Successful Level. The supervisor signs Form AD-658 if the employee’s performance is at the Fully Successful Level, and returns it to the Human Resources Field Office for processing.

The typical employee starts at the Step 1 level, and for employees in any Grade, a WGI occurs:

- at Steps 2-4, every year
- at Steps 5-7, every 2 years
- at Steps 8-10 every 3 years

WITHHOLDING A WGI

If an employee's performance is not at a Fully Successful Level, a WGI is not granted. The supervisor must have documentation reflecting the employee's unacceptable level of performance. Supervisors need to get the Labor and Employee relations Division involved in this process well before the 90 days prior to the WGI anniversary date. The employee is given an opportunity to bring their performance up through a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP), usually 60-90 days.

WGI DIRECTIVE

If an employee's performance improves during the PIP, the WGI is granted retroactively to the initial due date. The employee will receive an initial "lump sum" reflecting the amount of the WGI withheld during the PIP; and then, the regular amount thereafter. (See FSIS Directive 4531.1, Rev.4, dated 5/27/03 for detailed information on WGI procedures.) Specific instructions for withholding WGI's for bargaining unit employees can be found in this Directive, and in the Labor Management Agreement

STAFFING METHODOLOGY

Staffing levels are determined by Office of Field Operations management personnel assessing the workload in a plant. Full-time staffing options include hiring from the outside, reinstatement of former employees, and reassignment of an employee from another position. When a full-time staffing vacancy in a plant occurs, the District sends Form SF-52 to the Human Resources Field Office to initiate the re-staffing process.

USE OF INTERMITTENTS (or WAE-WHEN ACTUALLY EMPLOYED)

There are often "temporary" staffing vacancies at the in-plant level caused by employees using leave, attending training or a meeting, etc. The supervisor should contact their frontline supervisor and/or District Office in advance of these short term staffing vacancies (when possible) for guidance on using an Intermittent or WAE employee. The ability to use an Intermittent, or WAE, is sometimes affected by budget concerns.

The District Office, and the Human Resources Field Office, make ongoing efforts to maintain a number of eligible Intermittent or WAE employees in the local areas for use in these short term staffing vacancies. Intermittents are only eligible to work 1280 hours per year, and are hired on an on-call basis.

Intermittents are not regular part-time Federal employees. Intermittents do not receive the benefits of regular part-time and full-time FSIS employees, and do not accrue leave.

Intermittents are provided on-the-job training at the plant where their services are utilized. Intermittents can be terminated at will and have no appeal rights.

CAREER COUNSELING

Employees can discuss career opportunities with a supervisor, an experienced employee in the same occupations series for which he/she might qualify, or a representative of a professional association; such as, the National Association of Federal Veterinarians (NAFV) or the Association of Technical and Supervisory Personnel (ATSP)—two such professional associations in FSIS. Employees are encouraged to discuss developmental needs with a supervisor at their performance review meetings.

Supervisors should seek advice from their supervisors on how to counsel subordinates. There is an FSIS Career Guide currently under development. Supervisors can assist subordinates by reviewing job applications of inspectors as long as they are not involved in the selection.

Veterinarians will soon be able to access the Veterinary Career and Life Cycle pages on FSIS website for information on the different types of veterinary careers in FSIS. There are also regularly occurring articles in The Beacon (which is distributed to FSIS employees by e-mail) on career paths in FSIS.

MERIT PROMOTION

The federal employees who want to advance to other positions at higher grades must look for other job opportunities, and submit an application. This process is referred to as “merit promotions”. A “Vacancy Announcement” is prepared and distributed that advertises a vacant position, and solicits applications. Supervisors in plants are required to post Vacancy Announcements received from the Human Resources Field Office on the bulletin board in the Government Office. The Vacancy Announcement will contain the area of consideration, which lets potential applicants know if they are eligible to apply. If the area of consideration is “FSIS Wide”, only FSIS employees can apply; if it is “Government Wide”, only Federal employees can apply; if it is “All Sources”, this means anyone including people outside the Federal Government can apply. The application solicitation period is indicated on the vacancy announcement and usually runs 1-2 weeks.

Applications for field positions are sent to the Human Resources Field Office in Minneapolis, and for Headquarter positions to the Human Resources Division in Washington, D.C. Applicants submit a resume which addresses the knowledge, skills and abilities required; and, must also attach a copy of their last performance appraisal.

To be considered for selection, applicants who have to compete must:

- Apply by the deadline contained on the vacancy announcement.
- Be within the area of consideration contained on the vacancy announcement.

- Be evaluated based on the degree they possess of the knowledge, skills, and abilities stated in the vacancy announcement.
- Rate high enough to be included among the “best qualified” group that is referred to the hiring manager on a certification of eligible or “cert” for selection consideration.

The Human Resources Office:

- Screens each application for basic eligibility (to determine if the applicant’s background meets the experience and education requirements described in the vacancy announcement).
- Refers the applications of qualified applicants who do not have to compete to the hiring manager.
- Identifies which qualified applicants have to compete for the position, and which do not.
- Evaluates the applications of qualified applicants who competed to determine which will be included in the “best qualified” group and referred to the hiring manager. There is no exact number of applicants referred to the manager; it depends on a variety of factors; such as, how close the applicants are in terms of their qualifications. (When more than 10 applications are received, a panel is convened to review each applicant’s qualifications to determine which applicants are the “best qualified”. Additionally, other factors; such as special hiring authorities, applicants with veteran’s preferences, etc., will factor into the number of candidates that appear on a promotion certificate.)
- Refers “best qualified” applicants to the manager for selection consideration by furnishing a list, or “promotion certificate”, of the applicants whose scores were rated among the “best qualified” group.
- Lists the “best qualified” applicants in alphabetical order on the certificate (applicants’ scores are not given to the manager).
- Prepares separate list of applicants who do not have to compete; and, who meet the experience, education, and other basic eligibility requirements.

Managers can select from the “best qualified” list, or a list of applicants not required to compete or they can fill the position from a different source; e.g., re-announcing, or expanding the geographic area of consideration. When an FSIS employee is promoted to a higher Grade, the pay is set at an amount at least 2 within grade steps higher than that of his/her previous Grade Level.

MERIT PROMOTION AND THE RECURRING VACANCY SYSTEM

The Recurring Vacancy System is a competitive promotion process maintained by the Human Resources Field Office in Minneapolis. The system covers the position of Food Inspector, GS-8, 9 and 10 Consumer Safety Inspector, GS-9 Import Inspector, and GS-8 and 9 Egg Product Inspector.

Applicants interested in being considered for promotion to positions for which they are qualified can submit an application under the recurring system for automatic consideration for vacancies in the specified position(s) and geographic area(s). (See FSIS Directive 4335.6, Revision 1, Amendment 2, “Applying for Recurring Vacancies”, dated 3/19/04 for full details.)

AUTOMATION OF THE MERIT PROMOTION PROCESS

Automation is ongoing. There is currently a “Food Safety Jobs Online” Pilot at www.foodsafetyjobs.gov. The jobs listed at this site are also listed at the USAJOBS web site. Applicants apply for the position online by copying a resume into the system, and answering specific questions about the qualifying experience and education that are relevant to the position being filled.

After the announcement closes the system scores the applicant’s answers to questions in the vacancy announcement; then, places the applicants’ scores in rank order (the scoring system used was developed by an industrial psychologist). The Human Resources Specialist determines the cut-off for the number of applicants referred to the hiring manager. (More detailed information concerning this topic is contained in FSIS Directive 4335.1, Merit Promotion Plan, dated 5/6/99.)

All Federal vacancy announcements (including FSIS announcements) are listed at www.usajobs.opm.gov. All FSIS vacancy announcements contain a contact number for questions or further information. All promotions must be based on merit, and decisions must be made in a non-discriminatory manner.

MERIT PROMOTION AND INTERVIEWING

Selecting Officials (SO) may interview all, some, or none of the applicants. If the SO conducts interviews, they must use Behavioral Event Interviewing (BEI) methodology. BEI asks probing questions to solicit responses that will predict how an applicant will perform in the workplace. The questions asked are based on the skills required of the position; e.g., leadership, cognitive, managerial. (BEI methodology is described in FSIS Directive 4338.8 Dated 11/4/02.)

CIVIL RIGHTS DIVISION

The Civil Rights Division is located in Washington Headquarters with representatives in various Field Locations. Its mission is to provide advice, guidance and assistance on the implementation, management and compliance with Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) programs; in addition to, ensuring fair and equal treatment to internal and external customers.

EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY SPECIAL EMPHASIS PROGRAMS

FSIS’ Civil Rights Division is located at Headquarters in the Beltsville, MD, USDA facility. The Civil Rights Division is involved in many programs, and not just in the processing of EEO complaints. FSIS employees will notice posters and/or receive e-mails concerning events recognizing and celebrating the below-listed Special Emphasis Programs:

- Federal Women’s Program
- African American Program
- Hispanic Employment Program
- Asian American & Pacific Islanders Program

- American Indian/Alaska Native Program
- Disability Employment Program (HRD)
- Gay, Lesbian, Transgender, Bisexual Employee Program (USDA)

Equal Employment Opportunities goal:

- To provide a work environment free of unlawful discrimination.
- To create a workforce that values diversity.
- To promote an attractive and positive work environment that values all employees, and treats each individual with dignity and respect.
- To respond to the concerns of FSIS supervisors, managers and employees.

FILING AN EEO COMPLAINT

If an employee approaches you and asks how to file an EEO complaint, refer them to the Civil Rights Division Office for guidance. Any employee who believes they have been discriminated against must contact an Agency Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Counselor within 45 calendar days of the alleged discriminatory action. The alleged action must be based on one (or more) of the following basis:

- Age (40 and over)
- Race/Color
- National Origin
- Gender (includes sexual harassment)
- Religion
- Physical or Mental Disability
- Marital Status
- Sexual Orientation
- Reprisal (retaliation for previous EEO activity)

EEO-CIVIL RIGHTS

If you have a question or concern about the Civil Rights Division, or Equal Employment Opportunity, policies and practices:

- Visit them at their website at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OM/CRE/toc.htm> or
- Contact them via phone at 301-504-7760, or Voice/TTY/TDD at 1-800-269-6912, or Fax at 301-504-2141

ETHICS

All FSIS employees must adhere to government-wide ethical standards contained in the Code of Federal Regulations at 5 CFR 2635.

Because of our regulatory role in official establishments, bribery situations can and do occur. Any FSIS employee should immediately contact the USDA Office of the Inspector General immediately, and do not disclose to the person offering the bribe that you are making this contact; as, OIG will instruct you on how to proceed from there.

Conflicts of interest do occur and must be addressed. There can be financial conflicts of interest, family member conflicts, outside employment conflicts, etc. Misuse of office; a recurring example of this at the in-plant level, is the use of your Federal inspection badge for purposes not related to your official duties; that is, displaying a badge to a law enforcement official in an attempt to influence them (perhaps to not issue a speeding ticket.) FSIS strictly enforces their policy of disciplining employees for all types of misuse of office.

Misuse of government property is pretty simple to understand. Employees cannot use government property for any reason unrelated to official government business.

If you have any questions concerning an ethical matter, you can consult the FSIS Directive on Employee Responsibilities and Conduct, seek advice and guidance from your supervisor, and/or an Employee Relations Specialist in the Labor and Employee Relations Division to resolve conflicts of interest.

References:

- Standards of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch, 5 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 2635 and Executive Order 12674
- FSIS Directive 4735.3, Employee Responsibilities and Conduct
- Bribes – Contact USDA’s Office of the Inspector General (OIG) immediately
- Conflicts of Interest
- Misuse of office—using public office for private gain
- Misuse of government property
- Questions?? Contact LERD, 1-800-217-1886

WORK UNIT MEETINGS

In-plant work unit meetings are:

- An opportunity to discuss new policies, conduct training, correlate procedures and solicit concerns of the group;
- Usually conducted when plant is on down time;
- Initiated by the District Office, who will often direct that a work unit meeting be held. Be sure to hold the meeting during regular tours of duty, not at lunch or on designated breaks.
- If overtime proves to be necessary, be sure to get pre-approval from your frontline supervisor; since, expenditure of funds is involved.
- Types of training normally conducted during this time include ethics, sexual harassment, or workplace violence.

WORKSHOPS

Workshop I - Food Inspector Performance Standards (On-line)

Instructions:

Break up into pairs. Role play setting standards. One person plays the supervisor, the other plays the inspector; then, switch.

Supervisor Role: (40 minutes total, 20/20)

1. Identify the type of plant (e.g. poultry slaughter, livestock slaughter, processing)
2. Identify the job of the inspector (e.g. head inspector, viscera inspector)
3. Role play-identify what is “meets” expectations for each element that applies. (not all may/will)-Note-it is shown in user’s guide (meets). Then, let inspector ask questions. Sign and date the form.
4. Switch roles. (20 minutes)

Debrief:

Did you learn anything? _____

Tool: Food Inspector Performance Standards (On-line)

Workshop II – PHV, IIC; Performance Elements

Note: This is being updated to reflect the systems thinking and public health focus. But, this is what has been in effect.

Instructions:

1. Individually (5 minutes) – Review the performance elements.
 - a. List what you would do to meet expectations as stated.
 - b. List what you would do to exceed the expectations.
2. Break up into groups of 4-5 (15 minutes) - Discuss what you came up with for exceeding expectations.
3. Remain in original groups (20 minutes) – Each group reports out.

Debrief: Large group

Are there any trends? _____

Tool: Food Inspector Performance Standards (Off-line)