WRITING PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS AND STANDARDS

THAT ARE _ALIGNED WITH ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS_, _FOCUS ON RESULTS_, AND _HAVE REAL MEASURES_

from the Office of Personnel Management's September 2001 publication,

A HANDBOOK FOR MEASURING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE: ALIGNING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE PLANS WITH ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

http://www.opm.gov/perform/WPPDF/2002/HANDBOOK.PDF

The Eight-Step Process

STEP 1: LOOK AT THE OVERALL PICTURE

Review organizational goals and objectives and performance measures already available.

Determine which goals and measures the employee's work unit can affect.

STEP 2: DETERMINE WORK UNIT ACCOMPLISHMENTS USING ANY OR ALL OF THE FOLLOWING METHODS:

METHOD A: A GOAL CASCADING METHOD

Cascade the Agency and/or Program goals to the work unit level. Determine the work unit's accomplishments that directly affect the organization's goals.

The "goal cascading method" works best for Agencies and Programs that have clear organizational goals and objectives, such as strategic plans and annual performance plans prepared under the Government Performance and Results Act. AMS, APHIS, and GIPSA all have strategic plans with clear goals and detailed objectives that are tied into the USDA Strategic Plan. Many sub-Agency level Programs also have their own more detailed work plans that are aligned with the Agency's Strategic Plan.

This method requires answers to each of the following questions:

- WHAT ARE THE AGENCY'S (OR PROGRAM'S) SPECIFIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES?

   These can be found in the Agency or Program Strategic Plan, annual performance plan and customer service standards. (Note that this question repeats Step 1 of the eight-step process.)

_____

- WHICH AGENCY OR PROGRAM GOALS CAN THE WORK UNIT AFFECT?

  A work unit may affect only one Agency or Program goal, but in some situations, goals are written so broadly that the work unit may affect more than one.

- WHAT PRODUCT OR SERVICE DOES THE WORK UNIT PRODUCE OR PROVIDE TO HELP THE AGENCY OR PROGRAM REACH ITS GOALS?

  Clearly tying work unit products and services to organizational goals is key to this process. If a work unit finds it generates a product or service that does not affect organizational goals, the work unit needs to analyze the situation. It may decide to eliminate the product or service.

METHOD B: A CUSTOMER-FOCUSED METHOD

Determine the products or services that the work unit provides to its customers.

The "customer-focused method" works well when there are no clear agency goals and when the work unit knows who its customers are and what they expect.

Often this method is easier to apply to administrative work units that provide support functions, such as a human resources unit, an acquisitions unit, or a facilities maintenance unit.

This method focuses on achieving customer satisfaction and requires answers to each of the following questions:

- Who are the customers of the work unit?

  If the work unit provides a support function, most of its customers may be internal to the agency.

- What products and/ or services do the customers expect?

   Remember to describe accomplishments, not activities.

METHOD C: A WORK FLOW CHARTING METHOD

The "work flow charting method" works well for work units that are responsible for a complete work process, such as the processing of a case, the writing of a report, or the production of a customer information package.

This method asks work units to develop work flow charts.

A work flow chart is a picture of the major steps in a work process or project.

It begins with the first step of the work process, maps out each successive step, and ends with the final product or service.

TO HELP YOU BUILD YOUR WORK FLOW CHART, ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:

- How does the work unit produce its products or services?

  List the most basic steps in the process. For this purpose, you do not need to list all the activities required. (If you were analyzing the work to find ways of improving the process, you would need to list every activity.)

- Which are the most important steps in the process?

  By determining these steps, you highlight areas for performance measurement.

As you map out the process, you may find yourself describing activities.

Try to group the activities into key steps by describing the results of those activities as one step in the process.

STEP 3: DETERMINE INDIVIDUAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS THAT SUPPORT WORK UNIT GOALS

Elements that address individual performance can be identified using a role-results matrix. List the work unit accomplishments across the top of the matrix.

List each member of the work unit or each job position down the left side of the matrix.

In each cell, list the accomplishment (i. e., performance element) that the member must produce or perform to support the work unit accomplishment.

All performance elements should be either quantifiable or verifiable.

STEP 4: CONVERT EXPECTED ACCOMPLISHMENTS INTO PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS, INDICATING TYPE AND PRIORITY

All employees must have at least one critical element. Critical elements must address individual performance only.

Put the most important work results elements first.

STEP 5:   DETERMINE WORK UNIT AND INDIVIDUAL MEASURES

For each element, determine which general measures (i. e., quantity, quality, timeliness, or cost-effectiveness) are important.

Determine how to measure the quantity, quality, timeliness, and/or cost-effectiveness for the element.

If an accomplishment can be measured with numbers, determine the unit of measurement to be used.

If performance can only be described (i. e., observed and verified), clarify who would appraise the work and what factors they would look for.

STEP 6:   DEVELOP WORK UNIT AND INDIVIDUAL STANDARDS

A Fully Successful standard must be established for each element.

In USDA, the Fully Successful standard identifies the level of performance below which performance is Unacceptable.

If the measure for the element is <u>numeric</u>, determine the range of numbers that would represent Fully Successful performance.

If the measure for the element is <u>qualitative or descriptive</u>, determine what the appraiser would see or report that would verify that performance is Fully Successful.

For elements appraised at more than two levels (e.g., "meets" and "exceeds"), the best practice is to:

- establish a range of performance above which special recognition may be warranted;
- determine and describe what exceeding expectations would look like; and/or
- describe stretch goals.

Describe what the appraiser would see happening when expectations are exceeded.

STEP 7:   DETERMINE HOW TO MONITOR PERFORMANCE

Determine what data to collect for each performance element, which source the data should come from, and whether to collect all the data or just a sample.

Determine when to collect the data, who should collect it, and who should receive it.

Review existing reports for possible use as feedback reports.

Create feedback tables or graphs where appropriate or necessary.

Try to design feedback processes that give employees feedback automatically.

STEP 8: CHECK THE PERFORMANCE PLAN USING THE FOLLOWING GUIDELINES:

- Are the critical elements truly critical? Does failure on the critical element mean that the employee's overall performance is unacceptable?

- Is the range of acceptable performance clear? Are the performance expectations quantifiable, observable, and/ or verifiable?

- Are the standards attainable? Are expectations reasonable?

- Are the standards challenging? Does the work unit or employee need to exert a reasonable amount of effort to reach a fully successful performance level?

- Are the standards fair? Are they comparable to expectations for other employees in similar positions? Do they allow for some margin of error?

- Are the standards applicable? Can the appraiser use the standards to appraise performance? Can the appraiser manage the data collected through the measurement process?

- Will work units and employees understand what is required?

- Are the elements and standards flexible? Can they be adapted readily to changes in resources or objectives?

- If your program permits appraising elements at levels above the Fully Successful level, is the Fully Successful standard surpassable? Is it possible for a work unit's or an employee's performance to exceed it?