

**Performance Evaluation
Guidelines**

Ouray County

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MANAGING THE PERFORMANCE PROCESS

Performance Management consists of four major phases, which, taken together form an ongoing and complete performance management cycle.

PHASE I - *PERFORMANCE PLANNING*: In this first phase of the process the Job-Related Characteristics are reviewed to assure a common understanding of what Ouray County expects. Managers and professional employees set goals and objectives; non-management employees review their most critical responsibilities from their job description. Appraiser and employee discuss all job requirements and agree on performance expectations.

PHASE II – *PERFORMANCE EXECUTION*: The most important part of any performance management system is actual performance. After the performance planning meeting, performance execution begins. Ouray County employees work to achieve their goals and enhance their skills.

PHASE III - *PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT*: Both the appraiser and employee evaluate exactly how well the employee has performed against the performance plan established at the beginning of the review period.

PHASE IV - *PERFORMANCE REVIEW*: Finally, the appraiser and employee meet to discuss the employee's performance. In this meeting, they discuss the areas where the employee has demonstrated genuine strength, areas where improvement is needed, and opportunities for development.

Finally, the cycle begins again with performance planning for the next appraisal cycle.

GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATING PERFORMANCE

Assessing the quality of an employee's performance and writing a performance appraisal is one of management's toughest tasks. Performance counseling is intended to continuously improve employee competence. Formal performance reviews are a relatively infrequent occurrence; therefore, they deserve careful advance preparation in order to be productive. The following guidelines are designed to assist you in evaluating the performance of your employees:

WHAT DOES "FULLY SUCCESSFUL" JOB PERFORMANCE MEAN?

The Ouray County Performance Appraisal system provides for five levels of performance:

- TRULY DISTINGUISHED (typically < 5%)
- CLEARLY SUPERIOR (about 30%)
- FULLY SUCCESSFUL (about 50% or more)
- SOMEWHAT SUCCESSFUL (about 15%)
- UNSUCCESSFUL (<5%)

In the discussion you will be having with the employee whose performance you will be planning, it is helpful to think specifically *only* about what you will consider to be "FULLY SUCCESSFUL" performance.

Here's why. It is reasonably easy to identify six months or a year in advance what will qualify as "fully successful." It will also be reasonably easy to get the employee's agreement on what "fully successful" means. But trying to predict what will have to happen in order to assess an employee's performance as "Superior" or "Distinguished" is very difficult. Why? Because it's almost impossible to predict in advance what superior or distinguished performance will look like.

The same is true for performance that falls at the level of "Unsuccessful" or "Somewhat Successful." Therefore, just concentrate on defining what you will accept as "Fully Successful" performance and let the extremes on either side speak for themselves. If you're clear on exactly what "Fully Successful" looks like, both you and the employee will have little trouble recognizing when the employee's performance is significantly different . . . In either direction.

HOW DO I DETERMINE WHAT IS "FULLY SUCCESSFUL"?

The previous section explained why you should only try to determine in advance what "Fully Successful" performance looks like. But two other difficult questions arise when appraisers tackle the tough job of determining the quality of performance they should expect their employees to deliver:

1. "Should I set my expectations of "Fully Successful" at a passable and satisfactory level, or should I build some real stretch into my expectations?"
2. "Should I set the level of expected performance based on what the job requires or should I set it based on what I believe the employee is capable of delivering?"

In determining what “Fully Successful” performance is, concentrate on what the job requires. To set your expectations of one employee lower because you believe that their capability is limited is both insulting to him/her and unfair to others.

Set your expectations to the demands of the job, and recognize that the demands of the job rise every year. Top performers relish the challenge of meeting ever-higher goals, and managers with high expectations are organizational talent-magnets.

No doubt it is easier to accept whatever level of effort people may choose to provide than it is to maintain tough, aggressive and challenging expectations of everyone. But high performance flows, and high performers thrive, in an organization where high standards prevail.

MEASURING SUCCESS – THE MYTH OF QUANTIFIABILITY

Not everything can be measured with numbers. Not everything is quantifiable. Numerical measures rarely provide an accurate assessment of goal achievement. For example, the quality of a pianist is not measured by the number of notes she plays, and the quality of a teacher is not a function of how many papers he/she grades.

The mark of a good measure is not that it be *quantifiable*, but that it be *verifiable*. Numbers just happen to be easy to verify. While quantifiable, numerical, countable measures would be nice to have for every objective, the search for meaningful quantitative measures is often fruitless.

In creating measures to determine how well an objective has been achieved, begin by looking at the four general measures - QUANTITY, QUALITY, COST and TIMELINESS. Then ask yourself, “What do I most care about with regard to this accomplishment?”

Are you most concerned with the *quality* of the finished product? Or is the important thing the *number of units* produced? Or is getting the work done at the lowest possible *cost* the key issue? Or is *meeting the deadline* the paramount issue, no matter what else may have to be sacrificed?

Then ask, how could I measure what is most important to me using the general measures of Quantity / Quality / Cost / Timeliness? Is there a realistic and meaningful number or percent I could use?

If there is no meaningful number and the accomplishment can only be judged or described, ask, “Who would be a reasonable judge to assess how well this objective was achieved? And what criteria would that person use in forming their judgment?”

Then write down the specific ways in which the objective will be measured. If the measure is *numeric*, list the units you will keep track of. If the measure is *descriptive*, identify the judge and list the factors or criteria the judge will use.

USE OF THE JOB DESCRIPTION DURING THE APPRAISAL PROCESS

It would be difficult to determine an employee's level of performance without a definition of adequate performance. The job description identifies specific tasks and their purposes, and forms the basis for establishing performance standards. Through the appraisal process, the appraiser determines how well the employee has performed each of these tasks. Descriptions can also help to eliminate the fears that sometimes occur during performance evaluation since job expectations are clearly stated.

The job description should be used as a guide by the appraiser when completing the appraisal form and by the employee when filling out his or her self-assessment. The description serves to provide an objective basis by which to rate employees and appraisers should note specific reference to the description on the appraisal form when appropriate. This is also a good time to update the job description if it does not accurately portray the employee's duties and responsibilities.

Job descriptions can benefit the appraisal process in the following ways:

1. As an aid during the performance discussion. Both the appraiser and the employee should review the position description prior to the discussion and be prepared to discuss specifics.
2. To give the employee a good idea of his or her future with the County in terms of career opportunities. Managers can help employees develop upward mobility if they can see that their current job can lead to promotions or added responsibilities. In this way, the description can be used as a basis for setting goals and developing the strengths necessary in order to progress. However, please note it is important **not to make promises or create false expectations**.
3. As an objective tool when evaluating various employees performing the same work. If the description is used to set standards that must be met in order to perform the job effectively, then it can also be used as an aid when making decisions regarding promotions, raises, transfers, etc.

WHEN TO COMPLETE PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS

The Performance Planning and Appraisal Form may be used to evaluate an employee's performance on an annual basis, upon completion of trial service or a probationary period, or for other reasons as discussed below.

1. **Annual** – Refers to the employee's yearly performance review and typically coincides with the employee's anniversary date or the date the employee was last promoted, transferred or demoted to a position not previously held. A specific date for annual appraisals may also be established for all Ouray County employees. At a minimum, the performance of all employees should be assessed at the end of each twelve-month period.
2. **Probation (new hire)** – Refers to the initial six (6) months of employment served by a new employee hired into a regular position. At the end of the probationary period, the employee's performance should be evaluated. Refer to the Personnel Manual for the complete definition of Probationary Period.
3. **Probation (promotion, demotion, and lateral job changes)** – Employees who are promoted, transferred or demoted to a position not previously held, and who have satisfied the initial Probationary Period, serve a six-month probation period for the new position. At the end of this probation period, the employee's performance should be evaluated.
4. **Other** – Refers to any time the Performance Planning and Appraisal Form is utilized other than those circumstances cited above. Examples are: 1) as an initial performance planning tool for a new hire, or 2) if an appraisal becomes necessary to document a performance issue.

CREATING THE PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

CREATING THE WRITTEN PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL:

Creating a valid and effective assessment of an employee's performance is a three-step process:

1. Collect the data
2. Assess the performance
3. Write the appraisal

1. COLLECT THE DATA - The following suggestions provide a basis for you to get a significant amount of information about exactly how successful the employee's performance has been:

A. Consider the **JOB**:

- Read (or re-read) the job description
- Review the goals and objectives or the key job description elements determined at the beginning of the cycle
- Answer these questions:
 - The reason that Ouray County created this job is to . . .
 - The most important ways an employee in this job should spend their time are . . .
 - The two or three most important duties of a person holding this job are . . .
 - If someone asked me what it takes to be successful in this job, I would say. .
 - The easiest way to tell whether this job is being done well is . . .

B. Consider the **JOBHOLDER**:

- Objective data
- Critical incidents
- Behavioral observations
- Descriptive data

C. Consider the **PERSON**:

- How does this employee's performance this year compare with the performance of last year?
- What action has the employee taken on items you identified as needing improvement during the midyear review? How effective has this action been?
- To what extent has the person kept pace with technology and change?

D. Consider the **SELF-APPRAISAL**:

- Have all important accomplishments been discussed?
- Are there any significant differences of opinion between your opinion of the quality of the employee's performance and their own?
- Is there any evidence of minor attainments presented as colossal triumphs?
- Is the employee unduly harsh or lenient in evaluation of his or her own performance?

2. ASSESS THE PERFORMANCE

- Gather all of your information
- Get the big picture clearly in mind:
“What is the single most important message I want to communicate about the employee’s performance through this performance appraisal?”
- Identify the key elements:
 - Particular strengths demonstrated
 - Most critical needs for improvement
 - Most important development needs
- Muster your courage to tell the truth
 - Most accurate rating category for each employee objective
 - Most accurate narrative description for each explanation or summary

3. WRITE THE APPRAISAL

- Draft (before employee input)
Review/revise (after employee input)
Write final version
- Highlight the best evidence
- Give more evidence for especially high or low ratings
- Tell it like it is
- Avoid promises or assurances

STEPS TOWARD COMPLETION OF PERFORMANCE REVIEW:

1. Advise the employee of your approximate evaluation timetable so that he or she may also prepare.
2. Encourage the employee’s participation by requesting that he or she complete the **Employee’s Performance Planning and Self-Assessment Form** prior to the performance review meeting.

This form contains a list of ten (10) questions that were designed to make the employee think about his or her performance during the review period as well as goals and plans for future improvement. Encourage the employee to be honest and specific. **This form is intended to generate positive and constructive communication between the employee and appraiser. The employee should not be penalized for any comments made on this form.**

3. Complete the appropriate appraisal form for the employee’s job group. **Job Groups** were created when like positions were grouped together in order to determine core characteristics and group characteristics. **Positions were grouped into one of the following classes: (1) Administrative/Technical, (2) Director, (3) Labor, (4) Managers/Supervisors, (5) Protective Services, or (6) Specialist/Services.**

Consider the employee’s performance during the entire review period.

- ❑ Evaluate **job-related characteristics** using the approved descriptive rating scale. Performance ratings provide appraisers the opportunity to indicate the level at which the employee is performing each characteristic listed.

The rating scale approved by Ouray County is as follows:

Truly Distinguished – Has made an outstanding, unique or creative contribution that has had a positive quantifiable impact in the overall direction, effectiveness or performance of a department or team.

Clearly Superior – A clear and obvious strength. Well above average.

Fully Successful – Totally competent performance. Good solid contributor.

Somewhat Successful – Needs development. Some improvement required. More skill, experience and/or time in job required to attain fully successful performance.

Unsuccessful – Fails to meet minimum levels of acceptability. A serious deficiency.

- ❑ Identify and evaluate key technical responsibilities if there is an area that needs specific representation in the appraisal. Define Fully Successful job performance.
 - ❑ Identify goals established for the rating period and evaluate the results achieved against the goals set.
 - ❑ Provide specific examples of performance or behavior in the section entitled Areas Requiring Improvement.
 - ❑ In the Employee Development section, outline performance goals for the next review period.
 - ❑ In the Performance Development section, outline training goals for the next review period.
 - ❑ Use the Performance Summary section to highlight the employee's overall contribution to your unit.
4. Prepare for the performance evaluation discussion and schedule a specific time for the meeting. (Refer to the *Checklist of Supervisor's Activities Before the Review* for helpful hints.)
 5. Conduct the evaluation discussion:
 - ❑ Explain the purpose and your agenda
 - ❑ Encourage response from the employee and two-way communication
 - ❑ Mutually review performance expectations
 - ❑ Discuss your ratings using specific examples
 - ❑ Recognize areas of achievement and identify opportunities for improvement
 - ❑ Plan performance goals for the next review period
 - ❑ Explore career progress and determine developmental needs
 6. Encourage the employee to make written comments and secure the employee's signature.

7. After department head/elected official has approved the form, forward the completed appraisal form (along with a copy of the employee's self-appraisal, if applicable) to Human Resources.

APPRAISAL WRITING CHECKLIST:

- Is my written description of performance clear and to the point? If this appraisal were given to me, would I understand exactly where I exceeded and where I fell short of expectations?
- Have I analyzed and described the employee's performance honestly, factually and accurately? Did I tell it like it is?
- Have I praised a solidly good job where appropriate and avoided nit-picking relatively insignificant items?
- Have I identified actual examples to describe performance, especially when dealing with higher level, more abstract skills?
- Is my performance assessment consistent with other feedback I provided the employee during the year?
- Have I prioritized and focused on specific developmental needs, so that efforts at improving skills can be concentrated on areas of greatest importance?
- Have I outlined my plan for the discussion to make it a learning experience and not a one-sided judgment?
- Have I clearly determined the core message that I want to communicate during the performance review meeting?

THE PERFORMANCE REVIEW MEETING

CHECKLIST OF SUPERVISOR'S ACTIVITIES BEFORE THE REVIEW MEETING:

1. SCHEDULING

- Schedule the review and notify the employee ten days or two weeks in advance
- Ask the employee to prepare for the session by completing the employee's Performance Planning and Self Assessment Form and have it returned to you prior to the review meeting
- Answer any preliminary employee questions
- Discuss the meeting agenda with the employee

2. PREPARE FOR THE REVIEW – PRE-MEETING PREPARATION

- Plan for what is to be discussed, including specific facts and examples
- Gather all information, records and materials
- Establish session objectives and agenda
- Arrange for work coverage
- Include time to discuss the employee's concerns and questions
- Allow at least one uninterrupted hour for the session

3. CREATE A PROPER SETTING AND CLIMATE

- Choose a convenient time
- Pick an appropriate place. Select a location that is comfortable and free from distractions
- Take action to eliminate unannounced visitors and telephone calls. Make sure cell phones are turned off
- Consider facilities and room arrangement. Ensure that the selected location will encourage a frank and candid conversation
- Avoid a "let's get this over with" attitude

Source: Sherman, Bohlander, Chruden. *MANAGING HUMAN RESOURCES*, Eighth Edition, © 1988. South-Western Publishing Co., Cincinnati, Ohio, P. 261.

DISCUSSING APPRAISALS AND RATINGS:

For areas of **agreement**:

- ❑ Acknowledge the merits of the employee's reactions
- ❑ Add additional information of your own
- ❑ Point out where similar ratings are based on different facts or reasoning if this exists

For areas of **disagreement**:

- ❑ Begin with your higher ratings
- ❑ Proceed toward your lowest ratings
- ❑ Respond to employee's earlier appraisal
- ❑ Give specific examples
- ❑ State your reasons
- ❑ Use active listening
- ❑ Take extra time and care with sensitive issues

CLOSING THE PERFORMANCE REVIEW DISCUSSION:

- ❑ Short summary of entire discussion
- ❑ Two areas of strength to be continued and enhanced
- ❑ One area for immediate improvement
- ❑ One developmental need to be added to the next Personal Development Profile
- ❑ Administrative mechanics
- ❑ Conclude the performance review discussion by outlining performance plan for next year's performance

SUCCESSFUL APPRAISERS:

- ❑ Begin the discussion with a limited number of important objectives
- ❑ Listen well
- ❑ Anticipate sensitive areas
- ❑ Focus on observable behavior
- ❑ Provide specific examples to support their assessments
- ❑ Avoid arguments by refusing to put employees on the spot
- ❑ Muster the courage to:
 - Make tough judgments
 - Confront lackluster performance
 - Tell it like it is

COMMON PITFALLS OF COMPLETING PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS

1. Central tendency – The reluctance of the appraiser to rate either high or low; [the wish to stick to the safer middle ground of a “good” or “average” rating.](#)
2. Consistent over/under rating – [Tendency of an appraiser to be a lenient or a strict rater](#) of all employees in the unit.
3. Ratings are inconsistent with comments – Ratings imply one performance level and written comments imply a different level of performance.
4. Using ratings to justify personal feelings – Personal feelings about the employee show up in the performance ratings.
5. Halo Effect/Horn Effect – A high rating in one characteristic influences the appraiser to give a similar or higher undeserved rating in other characteristic. Conversely, a low rating in one characteristic influences undeserved low ratings in other dimensions.
6. Insufficient comments – Comments, suggestions and examples are not provided to justify ratings and to assist in improvement.
7. Lack of specific wording – Use of generalities when providing written examples.
8. Allowing salary grade to bias performance ratings – Tendency to give employees in higher salary grades higher ratings.
9. Bias about recent behavior – Too much attention is given to recent occurrences, either favorable or unfavorable, such that previous occurrences tend to be forgotten. Always evaluate [the employee’s performance over the course of the entire review period.](#)
10. Poor grammar and spelling – Poor word usage.
11. Rating new employees – The reluctance of managers to rate employees whom may be virtually unknown to them. The employee may be new to the unit or the supervisor may be new to the department.
12. Afraid of confrontations – The reluctance to make adverse ratings because the supervisor fears having to discuss the ratings with the employee.
13. Rater indecisiveness – The inability of the appraiser to make a categorical judgment.
14. Time – The unwillingness of managers to take the time necessary to evaluate their employees thoroughly. The performance appraisal process is time consuming, so plan ahead.
15. Politics – The need to play politics and tell department managers what they want to hear.

CHARACTERISTICS FOR JOB GROUPS

Characteristics – Characteristics are job-related skills determined to be critical for success on the job. By rating the characteristics determined to be critical for job success, the employee receives feedback on specific skill areas that need to be developed in order to achieve future objectives. (See Exhibit I for a list of all characteristics and definitions.)

1. **Core Characteristics** are relevant to a broad range of positions and allow performance management information to be used to compare an employee's performance to that required in other positions or roles. This comparability is useful in promotion decisions as well as career, succession and placement planning.

Through analysis, the three (3) core characteristics determined to be critical for Directors and Supervisors/Managers are:

**Initiative,
Integrity and
Teamwork/Working Relations.**

The three (3) core characteristics for all other employee groups are:

**Flexibility/Adaptability,
Teamwork/Working Relations, and
Quality of Work Product.**

2. **Group Characteristics** are relevant to a broad range of positions that fall within a particular job family. Again, this commonality provides useful information when comparing an employee's performance to that required in other positions or roles.

Through analysis, the group characteristics determined to be critical for each job family are listed below. There are five (5) group characteristics for each job family.

Administrative/Technical – (1) Customer Service Focus, (2) Communication/Working Relations, (3) Planning/Organization, (4) Job Knowledge, and (5) Stress Tolerance.

Labor – (1) Customer Service Focus, (2) Job Knowledge, (3) Productivity/Quality of Work, (4) Planning/Organization, and (5) Safety/Housekeeping.

Protective Services – (1) Stress Tolerance, (2) Judgment/Decision Making, (3) Job Knowledge, (4) Safety/Housekeeping, and (5) Communication/Working Relations.

Specialists/Services – (1) Analytical Skills/Problem Assessment, (2) Communication/Working Relations, (3) Integrity, (4) Planning/Organization, and (5) Customer Service Focus.

Managers/Supervisors – (1) Leadership/Employee Development, (2) Flexibility/Adaptability, (3) Communication/Working Relations, (4) Analytical Skills/Problem Assessment, and (5) Job Knowledge.

Directors – (1) Analytical Skills/Problem Assessment, (2) Communication/Working Relations, (3) Leadership/Employee Development, (4) Judgment/Decision Making, and (5) Strategic Leadership.

3. **Position Specific Characteristics** are specific to the position (not the individual) held by the incumbent.