



CIVILIAN PERSONNEL FACT SHEET

AIR FORCE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Air Force has implemented a new appraisal program for its US civilian employees. The change was in response to feedback from supervisors, commanders and employees for a simpler and less time-consuming system. There are three major changes in the program.

- First, the new program is a two-level rating system: Acceptable and Unacceptable performance. Civilian employees are rated on whether they meet or fail to meet performance element requirements.

- Second, impact on mission accomplishment statements are required for grades 14 and 15 for use in GS-15 screening boards. According to Air Force personnel officials, writing these statements is generally less work than is currently required to justify exceeding performance elements. These impact statements are optional for other grades.

-Third, the new system includes a mandatory feedback form. The law requires feedback once during the rating cycle and Air Force officials say the form facilitates the discussion between supervisor and employee. This form is the AF Form 860B; it is available on the AF pubs website.
(<http://afpubs.hq.af.mil>)

In addition, the award justification is simplified to nine lines, bullet format, as opposed to the past written narrative for performance elements. For grades 14 and 15, what is written on the mission impact statements can be used as the award justification, serving a dual purpose.

References:

AFI 36-1001, Managing the Civilian Performance Program

AFI 36-1003, Civilian Appraisal Impact on Mission Accomplishment Statements

5 CFR 43, Performance Management

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NEW CIVILIAN APPRAISAL PROGRAM QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q-1: When was the new system be implemented?

A-1: During the current 99-00 rating cycle, the first ratings will be rendered in March 2000.

Q-2: What will differentiate between merit promotion candidates since the majority of employees will be rated Acceptable?

A-2: The nine merit promotion appraisal factors will continue to be used. In addition, employees may be recognized through awards.

Q-3: How will this new two-level rating system affect reduction-in-force (RIF)? How will the best performers be retained?

A-3: Rating inflation has essentially created a two-level rating system, and performance is the last factor in RIF. Tenure, veteran's preference, and length of service carry more weight and have a greater influence. Under the new system, RIF will primarily be based on tenure, veteran's preference, and length of service since the majority of employees will receive Acceptable ratings and be assigned the same number of additional retention service credit points.

Q-4: Will employees coming to the Air Force from other agencies with a top rating from a five-level rating system be awarded the same amount of retention service credit in RIF for their appraisals as Air Force employees with Acceptable ratings?

A-4: Yes. When the RIF includes ratings from different rating pattern systems, for example ratings from a five-level rating system and a two-level rating system, all passing appraisals will be credited with the same number of retention service credit points for equity purposes.

Q-5: How will good performers be motivated in the new system since they will be lumped together with average Acceptable employees? How will outstanding employees be recognized in the new system?

A-5: Outstanding performers will receive positive feedback during their progress review and may also be recognized through awards. We anticipate that these good performers will continue to excel.

Q-6: Why are we requiring the extra workload associated with the impact on mission accomplishment bullets and the mandatory feedback form?

A-6: The impact on mission accomplishment data will be used in future GS-15 screening boards. The mandatory feedback form will facilitate the communication between supervisor and employee and is an essential component of the Civilian Appraisal Program. An Internet survey of commanders and military and civilian supervisors (who will accomplish the work) was conducted. The survey results showed the majority support both these changes. For military supervisors, there was a 90% support rate. For civilian supervisors, 70% supported the changes. (The fact that military supervisors are familiar with these two features as components of their systems may have impacted their level of support.) In addition, under the new system, there is less work because there is no requirement to justify exceeding performance elements, which can currently run more than a page. Moreover, 90% of supervisors of GS-14s and 15s rate three or less employees at these grades, which equals a maximum of 27 written lines.

Q-7: Since initial appraisals are eliminated, will supervisors be able to rate just the nine merit promotion appraisal factors for new employees to ensure they receive proper consideration for promotion?

A-7: Yes. After 90 days, a supervisor may revise the nine factors from the presumptive all 5s employees are assigned when they first come on board.

Q-8: Since the new system contains only critical elements, what will happen to noncritical elements, e.g., collateral duties of EEO counselors?

A-8: A review of the current noncritical element requirements should have been done before 1 Nov 99. Based on this review, the noncritical elements may be made additional elements, made critical elements, eliminated, or combined with a critical element/standard(s) if warranted.

Q-9: Did the performance plans have to be completely reaccomplished to eliminate noncritical elements?

A-9: No; pen-and-ink changes were acceptable.

Q-10: There does not appear to be enough room to include the entire critical element in some cases. Is it acceptable to summarize the element?

A-10: There is no need to include the performance element. Supervisors will simply annotate with an "X" whether the element requirements as described in the performance plan were met or not met.

Q-11: There is no space to document unacceptable ratings. Where will it be documented?

A-11: Unacceptable ratings will be documented separately. There is not enough space on the form to stand up as evidence in a formal proceeding. The instructions on the form refer supervisors to the Civilian Personnel Flight for assistance.

Q-12: Why is the code for an Acceptable rating an "R" and an Unacceptable rating an "N"?

A-12: These are the established computer codes for these rating level descriptors. The codes come from a system table that we share with other agencies. The definition of those codes, "Acceptable" and "Unacceptable," is what is seen on career briefs.

Q-13: Why aren't mission impact bullets required for lower-graded employees; they also contribute to the mission?

A-13: Mission impact bullets are optional for lower grades. They are mandatory for GS-14s and 15s for use in future GS-15 screening boards (like the military holds for key positions). This is linked to an Executive Resources Board (ERB) approved concept of screening boards, which is part of a larger initiative to revise the way we select and develop senior personnel. These boards will need a current word picture of an employee's accomplishments. As compared to future GS-15 screening boards, selections for other grades are generally based on personal knowledge of the individual or vouching information. In addition, the ratings are normally maintained by the immediate supervisor and not easily available for review by selecting officials. Therefore, mandatory completion of this information for the entire civilian workforce would create an unnecessary, extra workload.

Q-14: What criteria will be used to grant awards without more differentiation in the rating levels?

A-14: Organizations will review the award bullet statements when approving awards.

Q-15: Why doesn't the feedback form correlate to the nine merit promotion appraisal factors?

A-15: The performance feedback form assesses current performance against the performance element requirements and other performance factors. On the other hand, the merit promotion factors deal with work behaviors that can be observed in the context of the employee's current position and are considered predictive of performance at the next higher level.

Q-16: Why are we mandating this form when it may increase the number of grievances?

A-16: We don't anticipate an increase in the number of grievances. Rather, increased documentation of performance feedback will serve to support final ratings which are rendered. In a two-level rating

system, the majority of employees will be Acceptable. However, for employees who are Unacceptable, proper documentation is important.

Q-17: How will completion of the form be enforced?

A-17: It is a supervisory responsibility to complete the form.

Q-18: What happens when performance was not observed? All employees may not have an opportunity to demonstrate abilities such as skilled leader or writing clearly.

A-18: In these situations, performance items not observed are not rated. They may be annotated as not applicable (N/A).

Q-19: Why is the feedback form called a progress review worksheet?

A-19: Progress review was used because government-wide regulations use this term for communicating with employees about their performance. However, the form is commonly referred to as the feedback form.