

Human Resource Basics

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Performance standards are established for each position in FSIS. The supervisor must provide each employee with a performance plan “Performance Plan, Progress Review and Appraisal Worksheet” form AD435 at the beginning of each performance year or when the employee is assigned to a different position with substantially different duties and responsibilities, for example, promotion, reassignment or a detail or temporary promotion for 90 or more days. The supervisor meets with the employee, and discusses the employee’s performance with regard to each element in the performance plan at both the mid-year and annual reviews. The employees sign their performance plan at the beginning of the appraisal period, at the mid-year review and at the end of appraisal period. Ongoing communication is maintained with at least one progress review midway in the rating cycle.

Supervisors are obligated to advise an employee when his/her performance drops below the fully successful level. When an employee’s performance drops below the fully successful level, contact the Labor and Employee Relations Division (LERD) 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 improves, is removed, or is demoted.

Note: See directive 4040-430 for detailed information on performance management. [https://www.ocio.usda.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2012/DR-4040-430 Performance Mgmt Final 2013 09 30.pdf](https://www.ocio.usda.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2012/DR-4040-430%20Performance%20Mgmt%20Final%202013%2009%2030.pdf)).

PROBATIONARY EMPLOYEES

Newly hired federal employee must undergo a one-year probationary period. If a new employee is not performing at the minimum acceptable level, 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 identify those 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 FOLDER

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-50s indicating pay increases, your election or non-election form for the Federal life insurance program, SF-

52s indicating selections for promotions, details, or lateral assignments, health insurance form, beneficiary forms for life insurance and TSP funds, and other related documents.

Your OPF is established when you first become employed with the Federal government. In FSIS, the 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. The OPF is subject to the Privacy Act. You and your supervisor can review it; however, others must have the written permission from you to review the file.

GENERAL SCHEDULE SYSTEM

The general schedule system, established in the late 1940s focused on centralized planning and the application of uniform methods for a specific job series (e.g. position rather than performance).

Certain federal employees are hired at a specified General Schedule (GS) level. There are 15 Grade Levels (GS-1 through GS-15) and 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. 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.). The Office of Personnel Management’s website contains listings of the various locality pay rates of high cost-of-living cities, and areas in the U.S.

WITHIN GRADE INCREASES

Within Grade Increases (WGI) are regularly occurring pay increases given to General Schedule (GS) employees in Grades 1-15 (See OPM.GOV).

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

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 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 by 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 (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, strives to maintain a number of eligible intermittent 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. They 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 used.

CAREER COUNSELING

Employees can discuss career opportunities with a supervisor, an experienced employee in the same occupation 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). The Veterinary Career and Life Cycle Model has information on the different types of veterinary careers in FSIS and can be found on the following website: [Veterinary Opportunities](#).

There are also regularly occurring articles in The Beacon (which is distributed to FSIS employees by e-mail) on career paths in FSIS.

Supervisors should seek advice from their manager on how to counsel subordinates. There is an FSIS Career Guide and an FSIS Leadership Career Guide available on the Intranet at <https://inside.fsis.usda.gov/fsis/emp/static/employee/career/career.jsp> that can help Agency employees plan and develop their careers. Supervisors can assist direct reports by reviewing job applications of inspectors, as long as they are not involved in the selection for that particular vacancy. All employees should be encouraged to discuss developmental needs with a supervisor at their performance review meetings.

MERIT PROMOTION

Federal employees who want to advance their career opportunities within the Federal government must look for job opportunities (www.usajobs.gov) and submit an application. A "Vacancy Announcement" is prepared and distributed which advertises a vacant position, with a request for all qualified applicants. 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", all federal employees can apply; if it is "All Sources", this means anyone within or 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 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 vacancy requirements (e.g. degrees, 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 applicants or "cert" for selection consideration.

The Human Resources Office will

- Screen each application for basic eligibility (to determine if the applicant's background meets the experience and education requirements described in the vacancy announcement).
- Identify which qualified applicants have to compete for the position, and which do not.
- Refer the applications of non-competitive, qualified applicants to the hiring manager.
- Rank competitive applicants for inclusion in the "best qualified" group.
- List the "best qualified" applicants in alphabetical order on the certificate (applicants' scores are not given to the manager).
- Refer "best qualified" applicants to the manager for selection consideration. 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.)

Managers can select from the “best qualified” list, or a list of non-competitive applicants or they can fill the position from a different source; e.g., re-announcing, or expanding the geographic area of consideration.

MERIT PROMOTION AND INTERVIEWING

Recommending Officials (RO) may interview all, some, or none of the applicants. If the RO conducts interviews, they must use Behavioral Event Interviewing (BEI) methodology. BEI asks questions 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 4335.8)

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/wps/portal/informational/aboutfsis/civil-rights>

ETHICS

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. You can also contact a U.S. Department of Agriculture Ethics Advisor at <https://www.ethics.usda.gov/advisor.htm>
Some of the more common questions deal with the following concerns:

- Because of our regulatory role in official establishments, bribery situations can and do occur. FSIS employees should immediately contact the USDA Office of the Inspector General (OIG) immediately (without disclosing this information to the person offering the bribe). OIG will provide instructions on how to proceed.
- 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 at the in-plant level, is the use of a Federal inspection badge for purposes not related to official duties. (For example, an employee displays a badge to a law enforcement official to avoid a speeding ticket.) FSIS strictly enforces the policy of disciplining employees for all types of misuse of office.
- Employees cannot use government property for any reason unrelated to official government business.

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

WORK UNIT MEETINGS

In-plant work unit meetings are an opportunity to discuss new policies, conduct training, correlate procedures and solicit the concerns of the group. They are usually conducted when plant is on down time. However, if overtime proves to be necessary, be sure to get pre-approval from your frontline supervisor, since expenditure of funds is involved. Some work unit meetings are initiated by the District Office or the Frontline Supervisor, who will often direct that a work unit meeting be held. These meetings should be held during regular tours of duty, not at lunch or on designated breaks. The types of training normally conducted during this time include ethics, sexual harassment, or workplace violence.

Workshop - Food Inspector Performance Standards (On-line)

Scenario 1 Food Inspector Performance Standards:

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)

Scenario 2 Performance Elements

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)

