

Performance Appraisals ^{1,2}

The goal of a performance appraisal (performance review) is to give your employees feedback on what they are doing right, and what they could be doing better. Performance reviews can be formal or informal. Informal feedback provided throughout the year can help employees to grow, learn, stay motivated, and succeed at your organization. Formal performance reviews have the same purpose, but carry more weight, as they are often kept on file and can help determine an employee's future at the organization. Performance reviews should occur for all staff at least annually, but can occur more frequently if desired.

There should be two major components to an annual performance review.^{1,2} The first is the written evaluation, and the other is the in-person review. Complete the written portion of the performance review prior to the in-person meeting. During the in-person meeting, give the employee the opportunity to share their own thoughts on their performance before you begin to talk about their evaluation. Then talk through the written evaluation with the employee. Give the employee an opportunity to ask questions about what they hear.

Goals

During a performance review, it is useful to set goals that can be used to evaluate performance in the future. Goals should be created with input from both the employee and the supervisor. If goals were established in the prior year, the evaluation should include an assessment of the achievement of these goals.

There are two types of goals, performance goals and development goals.

- **Performance Goals** describe what you are trying to accomplish. These goals are tied to organizational priorities. An example of a performance goal for an outreach worker at a Healthy Start site might be, "Recruit 10 new clients each month."
- **Development Goals** are areas in which the employee can develop or grow to improve their performance or advance in their career. An example of a development goal for a Healthy Start home visitor might be, "Become a Certified Lactation Specialist within the year".

Goals should be **SMART**, that is, specific, measurable, ambitious and achievable, results-based, and time-bound. 'Specific' means that they say exactly what it is that will occur. 'Measurable' means that there is a way to know when the goal has been accomplished or progress has been made. 'Ambitious and achievable' means that it will require effort to achieve the goal, but that the person is capable of achieving it. 'Results-based' means that the goal focuses on the outcome desired, rather than the steps taken to achieve it. Lastly, goals should be 'time-bound', in that there should be a timeframe in which the goals should be achieved. Both of the example goals above would be considered SMART goals.

Areas to Evaluate

What exactly should a performance review cover? Most supervisors have a standard performance review template, which usually includes measures to assess the following:

- Quality and quantity of work
- Communication and interpersonal skills
- Planning, administration, and organization

- Leadership
- Job knowledge and expertise
- Attitude
- Ethics
- Creative thinking
- Self-development and growth

It is important to remember that different members of your staff have different roles and responsibilities. The degree to which each of these areas has bearing on the overall evaluation of performance will vary by their role.

Tips for Evaluating Performance

- Ask employees to self-evaluate.
- Seek feedback from key co-workers.
- Consider the degree of difficulty in assignments. Has the employee being doing the same work they've done in the past, or have they taken on new work? Has their work expanded in scope or responsibility?
- Judge performance, not potential.
- Judge achievement, not progress.
- Review performance for the entire cycle.
- Review each objective/aspect of performance independently.
- Be a courageous, conscientious reviewer.
- Use meaningful, measurement-oriented language such as: excels, exhibits, demonstrates, grasps, generates, manages, possesses, communicates, monitors, directs, and achieves.

Avoid Rating Pitfalls

There are some things you should try not to do when conducting a performance review. Avoid these pitfalls to ensure that the performance review is useful to both the employee and to you as a supervisor:

- **Leniency:** Avoid using a less stringent set of standards to rate an employee, which can result in an inflated rating.
- **Halo Effect:** Avoid giving an employee an overall rating, either positive or negative, based on the evaluation of a single performance objective, which can result in an inaccurate evaluation of overall performance.
- **Central Tendency:** Avoid the tendency to cluster all ratings at the center of a rating scale.
- **Impressions:** Avoid rating an employee on the basis of impressions and gut feelings rather than on concrete, observable examples of performance, behaviors, and skills gathered over the performance period.
- **Recency Effect:** Avoid rating an employee on his/her most recent performance or contributions, rather than on their performance during the entire review period.

Remember...

A formal annual review is essential, but should not be the only time your employees receive feedback. Check in with your staff regularly and have casual conversations about their



performance and potential for improvement. This will improve the performance of your program, and will also improve staff morale!