



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

November 24, 2025

Memorandum

To: Assistant Secretaries
Heads of Bureaus and Offices
Bureau/Office Human Capital Officers

From: Jennifer A. Ackerman
Director, Office of Human Capital
Deputy Chief Human Capital Officer

Subject: Guidance on Closing FY 2025 Performance Appraisals and Establishing FY 2026 Performance Plans for General Workforce Employees

This memorandum is intended to serve as guidance for completing Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 performance appraisals and establishing FY 2026 performance plans for covered general workforce (i.e., non-SES/SL/ST) employees. The guidance does not apply to temporary and excepted service employees whose employment is not expected to exceed 90 days in a consecutive 12-month period or to Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) employees covered by 25 U.S.C. § 2012 (Title 25 employees).

On June 17, 2025, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) issued guidance on [Performance Management for Federal Employees](#) and on August 11, 2025, issued [Guidance on Awards for Federal Employees](#). Rating Officials, Reviewing Officials, and employees are encouraged to review the guidance in conjunction with this memorandum. Guidance on performance-based recognition is forthcoming.

Closing FY 2025 Performance Appraisals

The condensed FY 2025 performance cycle began July 18 and would have ended on October 18, 2025; however, due to the shutdown furlough, the timeline has been revised. **Accordingly, the FY 2025 performance cycle will officially end on Monday, December 1, 2025.** FY 2025 performance plans may not be closed out before this date. Covered general workforce employees not under a performance plan for the minimum period of 90-days by December 12, 2025, will not be eligible for a FY 2025 rating. Managers and employees must make every effort to adhere to these deadlines and any deviation must be supported by good cause (such as legally required extensions in the instance of a Notice of Opportunity to Demonstrate Acceptable Performance) and must be submitted to the Director, Office of Human Capital.

Consistent with OPM guidance, federal agencies should ensure employee performance ratings are normalized and reflect individual contributions to organizational results and outcomes,

ensuring a disproportionate number of employees are not arbitrarily rated at the highest performance levels (summary rating levels 4 and 5). Performance evaluation results must make meaningful distinctions based on relative performance. A fully successful rating must reflect that the employee is achieving all expectations for their position and is contributing in a meaningful way to the agency's success in meeting organizational goals.

The Department's Performance Management Policy, [370 DM 430](#) and Handbook, [370 DM 430HB](#), require a clear link between individual performance and organizational results. Supervisors must evaluate employee performance against the criteria established in the performance plan, assign a numerical rating for each critical element, and take the average numerical score to determine the overall rating of record.

Supervisors, in consultation with their servicing Human Resource Office, should move quickly to address situations in which employees are not meeting performance expectations, by clarifying expectations, providing training or other resources or taking formal action to address deficiencies. Corrective action is required for all employees who are not performing at the fully successful level. Appropriate corrective action may include providing training relevant to the specific deficiency, denial of a within-grade-increase; initiating formal performance-based or disciplinary action; or in the case of employees serving a probationary/trial period, initiation of action to remove the individual from their job.

Establishing FY 2026 Performance Plans

FY 2025 performance appraisals must be completed prior to establishing FY 2026 performance plans. The FY 2026 performance plan templates – both the Employee Performance Appraisal Plan (EPAP) and Supervisory Performance Appraisal Plan (SPAP), will be available beginning December 1, 2025 in [USA Performance](#), OPM's paperless performance management system, which the Department began transitioning to in FY 2024. USA Performance continues to be mandatory with very few exceptions. FY 2026 performance plans must be established in USA Performance for all covered general workforce employees by January 9, 2026.

Consistent with OPM's performance guidance, agencies have been charged with reforming performance management across the Federal government to drive a high performance, high accountability culture. Performance plans should set forth clear performance expectations and goals that align individual employee efforts with organizational goals, the agency's mission, and the President's policy priorities ([Attachment A](#)). Supervisors and managers are strongly encouraged to define performance standards for each rating level – Unsatisfactory (level 1), Fully Successful (level 3), Exceeds Expectations (level 4), and Outstanding (level 5).

Supervisory performance plans must include the OPM-developed critical element for holding employees accountable ([Attachment B](#)). Neither the element nor the standards may be augmented or edited. This critical element is auto-assigned to the SPAP template in USA Performance.

DOI's performance program now requires a minimum of three progress reviews, with at least one formal progress review documented in USA Performance, at approximately the midpoint of the performance cycle. Two other progress reviews shall be conducted but are not required to be

documented in USA Performance. Supervisors may hold more frequent progress reviews, as necessary and appropriate.

FY 2025 Closeout and FY 2026 Performance Activity Timeline

To ensure supervisors have adequate time to close out and evaluate FY 2025 performance appraisals and establish new FY 2026 performance plans, the following key performance dates and milestones have been revised for FY 2025 and FY 2026. Employees and Rating Officials should plan performance management activities accordingly:

Key Dates	Performance Management Activity
December 1, 2025	FY 2025 Performance Cycle ends.
By December 12, 2025	Rating Officials closeout FY 2025 performance appraisals. Human Resources begins the quality review of appraisals. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA Performance, Parts 3-5 (Rating Phase)
Between December 1, 2025 – January 9, 2026	Beginning date of FY 2026 performance cycle. Rating Officials should establish FY 2026 performance plans in USA Performance only after FY 2025 appraisals have been completed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA Performance, Part 1 (Establish Plan)
Between January 9 – January 23, 2026	Human Resources completes their quality review of performance appraisals and transmits to eOPF. This time may also be used for initiating performance-based recognition, consistent with forthcoming guidance.
The following dates are specific to FY 2026 performance plans	
Around March 15, 2026	Required progress review (1 of 3). This progress is not required to be documented in USA Performance.
Around May 15, 2026	Required formal progress review (2 of 3) conducted at the approximate midpoint of the performance cycle. This progress review must be documented in USA Performance. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USA Performance, Part 2 (Progress Review)
Around July 15, 2026	Required progress review (3 of 3). This progress review is not required to be documented in USA Performance.
September 30, 2026	End date of FY 2026 performance cycle. Guidance for closing out FY 2026 performance appraisals and establishing FY 2025 performance plans will be issued.

Additional resources are available on OPM's [Performance Management Toolkit](#) and on the OneInterior's [Performance Management](#) page. Requests for assistance with year-end

performance management guidance should be directed to [your Bureau/Office Human Resource POC](#).

Attachments – 3

Att A – Guidance for Establishing FY 2026 Plans

Att B – Required Supervisory Performance Element and Performance Standards

Att C – Interim Strategic Priorities

Attachment A – Guidance for Establishing FY 2026 Plans

Well-developed performance plans let employees know what they need to accomplish and the standards that will be used to evaluate their performance. To ensure a more robust performance management program and to increase accountability throughout the process, performance plans must align with the following guidance:

- Performance plans should be drafted at the beginning of the performance cycle and discussed in advance with the employee. An explicit alignment of daily activities with broader results is one of the defining features of effective performance management systems in high-performing organizations.
- Government-wide regulations require that a specific performance standard be established for each critical element at the Fully Successful level or higher. Performance standards may be more or less objective depending on the job but must be sufficiently specific to provide a firm benchmark toward which employees must aim their performance. The Fully Successful level must be written to represent what is **regularly expected** of an employee to contribute meaningfully to an organization's success in meeting its mission and goals. The Fully Successful level should never be characterized as a low level of performance or be phrased in such a way as to define unacceptable performance.
- At least one critical element, and preferably all elements, should align with and support organizational goals and targets that are established in an organization's annual performance/strategic plan and/or that have been included in the SES members' performance plans. DOI's Interim Strategic Goals are attached ([Attachment C](#)). Alignment should be clear so that employees can see how their performance plans support achievement of organizational goals. Merely including a generic statement in performance plans that employees' performance requirements support organizational goals is not adequate for communicating alignment. Similarly, simply restating organizational goals without also including the metrics for determining performance against those goals is not adequate.
- Critical elements and standards should be written in terms of expected results. While plans may include critical elements that focus on competencies such as teamwork or customer service, at least one critical element must hold an employee accountable for achieving a result that directly supports organizational goal achievement.
- All supervisors and employees must be provided training in performance management. USA Performance training can be found in [DOI Talent](#).
- Employees must be engaged in the process of determining critical elements and performance standards. The EPAP requires supervisors and employees to sign the EPAP form to verify that employee involvement was solicited.
- DOI's performance program now requires a minimum of three progress reviews, **with at least one formal review documented** at approximately the midpoint of the performance cycle. Progress review discussions should provide specific information on where the

employee is failing to meet expectations (if applicable), where the employee is meeting or exceeding expectations, and how the employee can continue to grow. Supervisors and managers must plan accordingly to ensure progress reviews are conducted timely and meaningful.

Attachment B – Required Supervisory Performance Element and Performance Standards

Critical Element

Holding Employees Accountable. Ensures subordinate's commitment to efficient work execution. Models self-accountability and holds subordinates accountable for high-quality results. Recognizes, supports, and rewards excellent work from employees supervised. Timely and efficiently addresses poor and mediocre performance of employees supervised—including seeking appropriate action up to removal from the Federal service. Takes appropriate action when employees report concerns of illegal conduct or waste, fraud, or abuse.

Performance Standards

Unsuccessful (Level 1): The employee's performance is unacceptable. The quality and/or quantity of the employee's work and leadership are not adequate for the position.

Fully Successful (Level 3): The supervisor consistently demonstrates the following behaviors and results:

- Ensures that subordinates are committed to executing work efficiently and effectively, modeling self-accountability in all tasks.
- Holds subordinates accountable for delivering high-quality results, setting clear expectations and standards.
- Actively recognizes, supports, and rewards excellent work of employees, fostering a culture of achievement and motivation.
- Addresses poor and mediocre performance in a timely and efficient manner, implementing corrective actions as necessary, including considering removal from Federal service if appropriate.
- Consistently takes appropriate action when employees report concerns of illegal conduct or waste, fraud, or abuse.

Exceeds Expectations (Level 4): The supervisor consistently demonstrates the following behaviors and results:

- Demonstrates strong commitment to efficient work execution among subordinates, consistently optimizing processes to enhance productivity.
- Achieves excellent results through subordinates by setting clear goals and providing the necessary resources and guidance to consistently meet and exceed expectations.
- Actively identifies and celebrates outstanding contributions from employees, implementing effective recognition programs that boost morale and motivation.
- Manages performance issues effectively, resulting in noticeable improvements in employee performance and engagement. Handles complex employee situations with skill, using appropriate administrative actions.
- Fosters an environment where employees feel safe to report concerns of illegal conduct or waste, fraud, or abuse.

Outstanding (Level 5): The supervisor consistently demonstrates the following behaviors and results:

- Consistently demonstrates and instills a strong commitment to efficient work execution among subordinates, leading by example and optimizing processes to enhance productivity.
- Achieves exceptional results through subordinates by setting clear, ambitious goals and providing the necessary resources and guidance to exceed expectations consistently.
- Proactively identifies and celebrates outstanding contributions from employees, implementing innovative recognition programs that significantly boost morale and motivation.
- Effectively manages performance issues with a strategic approach, resulting in noticeable improvements in employee performance and engagement. Demonstrates skillful handling of complex and sensitive employee situations, including successful resolution of performance-related challenges using the full range of administrative actions.
- Fosters a transparent and supportive environment where employees feel safe to report concerns of illegal conduct or waste, fraud, or abuse.

Outstanding performance in this element reflects a supervisor who not only meets the basic requirements but exceeds them by creating a high-performing team that consistently delivers exceptional results, while maintaining a positive and compliant workplace culture.

Attachment C – Departmental Interim Strategic Priorities

Below are the Interim Strategic Priorities that are used for the strategic alignment requirement of performance plans that should be used until a new strategic plan is released.

- Priority 1: Energy production and delivery for current and future needs
- Priority 2: Strategic use of fair market value for resources on public and tribal lands
- Priority 3: Management and delivery of water
- Priority 4: Safety and protections for our people, property, and resources
- Priority 5: Recreational and traditional use of lands and waters
- Priority 6: Conservation of lands, waters, species, and heritage
- Priority 7: Upholding treaty obligations to Tribes, American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and Insular Communities
- Priority 8: Service to communities that rely on Interior's capacity for science, data, and technologies
- Priority 9: Delivery of information, ease of doing business, public and other engagements
- Priority 10: Efficiency, effectiveness, security, and accountability of Government operations
- Priority 11: Customer experience, user experience, digital experience
- Priority 12: Implementing Secretarial and Administration priorities, legislation, and directed initiatives