

## PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To revise Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) policy regarding performance management systems.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENT/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook contains mandatory VA procedures on performance management systems within the Department. The pages in this issuance replace the corresponding page numbers in VA Handbook 5013. Revised text is contained in [brackets]. Page I-1a is deleted. Appendix F of Part I which was previously deleted April 6, 2007, is reestablished to provide policy and procedures specific to the Veterans Health Administration's Executive Career Field (ECF). These changes will be incorporated into the electronic version of VA Handbook 5013 that is maintained on the [Office of Human Resources Management Web site](#). Significant changes include:
  - a. Clarifies that Appendix F supplements VA Handbook 5013, Part I. Therefore, unless specifically covered in the appendix, the provisions of Part I apply;
  - b. Covers all non-SES ECF employees under Appendix F for performance counseling purposes by eliminating the requirement to refer to Part II of the handbook when counseling Title 38 employees;
  - c. Clarifies that a Minimally Satisfactory summary rating may be assigned without the completion of a formal opportunity to improve (i.e. a performance improvement period or PIP) as long as the Rater initiates some form of assistance to the employee in a timely manner;
  - d. Clarifies the two-step procedure for requesting a higher level review of the summary rating;
  - e. Clarifies that the two-step higher level review process is provided to covered ECF employees in lieu of the informal and formal grievance procedures contained in Part I, paragraph 11.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Employee Relations and Performance Management Service (051), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management.
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VA Directive 5013, Performance Management Systems.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** None.

**CERTIFIED BY:**

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY OF  
VETERANS AFFAIRS**

/s/  
Roger W. Baker  
Assistant Secretary for  
Information and Technology

/s/  
John U. Sepúlveda  
Assistant Secretary for  
Human Resources and Administration

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**PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS**

**PART I. TITLE 5 PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL PROGRAM**

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**PART I. TITLE 5 PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL PROGRAM**

**1. COVERAGE.** This part applies to the process used to appraise the performance of the following Department of Veterans Affairs employees: (**NOTE:** This policy applies to bargaining unit employees, unless negotiated provisions in National Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding provide otherwise.)

- a. General Schedule employees, including employees covered by the Performance Management and Recognition System Termination Act of 1993.
- b. Federal Wage System employees.
- c. Scientific and Technical (Senior Level) employees paid under 5 U.S.C. 5376.
- d. Full-time, part-time and intermittent hybrid Title 38 employees appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7401(3) or 7405(a)(1)(B).
- e. Veterans Canteen Service employees appointed under 38 U.S.C., chapter 78.
- f. Temporary and Term employees, except as specifically excluded.
- g. All Veterans Health Administration (VHA) employees [under the Executive Career Field Performance Appraisal Program fall under the provisions of Appendix F of this part. However, for matters not specifically covered by Appendix F, the provisions of this part shall apply].

**2. EXCLUSIONS.** This part excludes the following:

- a. Officers appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, or by the President alone, to positions for which rates of basic compensation may exceed the maximum rate provided in the General Schedule.
- b. Employees in the Senior Executive Service.
- c. Full-time, part-time, and intermittent physicians, dentists, chiropractors, nurses, nurse anesthetists, optometrists, podiatrists, physician assistants, expanded-function dental auxiliaries appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7401(1), 7405(a)(1)(A), or 7406, and individuals appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7306 in the Office of the Under Secretary for Health.
- d. Non-U.S. citizens employed at the VA Regional Office, Manila, Republic of the Philippines, who are paid according to local prevailing wage rates.
- e. Temporary employees in the excepted service for which employment is not reasonably expected to exceed 90 days in a 12-month period.
- f. Members of the Board of Veterans' Appeals and the Board of Contract Appeals.
- g. Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) non-executive directors.
- h. Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Associated Health Trainees.

### 3. GENERAL PROVISIONS

- a. Performance will be rated for each element as Exceptional, Fully Successful, or Less Than Fully Successful, and at a summary level as Outstanding, Excellent, Fully Successful, Minimally Satisfactory, or Unsatisfactory, which correspond to Levels 1 through 5--Pattern H. (See VA Handbook 5013, Part I, Appendix A, subparagraph 5d.)
- b. The results of the performance appraisal are used as the basis for granting within-grade and quality step increases, and for determining performance awards, as well as training, rewarding, reassigning, promoting, reducing in grade, retaining and removing employees.
- c. The appraisal period is the one-year period that begins on October 1 and ends on September 30 unless otherwise designated by an Under Secretary, Assistant Secretary, or Other Key Official. In the case where a change in rating cycle is being made, notification will be issued establishing and defining an alternative appraisal cycle.
- d. The performance management system for VBA non-executive directors is contained in VA Handbook 5013, Part I, Appendices D and E.
- e. [The performance appraisal program for VHA supervisors and managers in the Executive Career Field is contained in VA Handbook 5013, Part I, Appendix F.
- f.] Performance plans will be documented on VA Form 0750 or VA Form 3482e, as appropriate.

**4. EVALUATION.** Administration Heads, Assistant Secretaries and Other Key Officials will periodically evaluate the effectiveness of performance management within their respective organizations. The Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management will analyze and evaluate the overall effectiveness of VA's performance appraisal program and recommend modifications as necessary.

### 5. DEFINITIONS

a. **Achievement Level.** The overall level of accomplishment for each element as measured against the pre-established performance standards. Achievement levels are defined as follows:

(1) **Exceptional.** All Fully Successful performance standards for the element are significantly surpassed. This level is reserved for employees whose performance in the element far exceeds normal expectations and results in significant contributions to the organization.

(2) **Fully Successful.** Performance standards for the particular element when taken as a whole are being met. This level is a positive indication of employee performance and means the employee is effectively meeting performance demands for this component of the job.

(3) **Less Than Fully Successful.** A level of performance that does not meet a standard established for the Fully Successful level. Assignment of this achievement level means that performance of the element is not acceptable.

b. **Appraisal.** The process under which performance is reviewed and evaluated.

**[APPENDIX F. PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL PROGRAM  
FOR VHA EMPLOYEES IN THE EXECUTIVE CAREER FIELD**

**NOTE:** *The performance appraisal program described in this appendix is for VHA employees who are covered by the Executive Career Field (ECF). Although VHA Senior Executive Service (SES) employees are considered part of VHA's ECF program, they are covered under VA Directive and Handbook 5027, Part V, for purposes of managing and appraising performance.*

- 1. PURPOSE.** This appendix defines the performance appraisal program used to measure the performance of non-SES employees in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Executive Career Field.
- 2. SCOPE.** Non-SES employees in VHA's ECF program are covered under this appendix which complies with VA's 5-level Performance Appraisal Program approved by the Office of Personnel Management (see Appendix B). This appendix supplements part I of this handbook to define the policies and procedures that apply to the performance appraisal program for VHA ECF employees. Unless specifically covered in this appendix, the policy language in part I of this handbook will apply.
- 3. COVERAGE.** This appendix covers non-SES supervisory and managerial employees in VHA's ECF program. This includes all title 5, hybrid, and title 38 employees in levels II, III, and IV (excluding SES) assigned to a position for at least 120 days which has been designated as supervisory or managerial.
- 4. DEFINITIONS.** In addition to the definitions listed below, the definitions contained in part I of this handbook apply to this appendix.
  - a. **Approving Official.** The designated official at a higher management level than the Rater who reviews and approves all Minimally Satisfactory and Unacceptable summary ratings.
  - b. **HPDM.** The High Performance Development Model (HPDM) provides a framework for the VHA to develop a highly-skilled, customer-centered workforce. By focusing on eight core competencies, HPDM contributes to the development of a continuous supply of excellent leaders committed to VHA's mission. For training and education purposes, each of the eight core competencies have been divided into four levels as described below.
  - c. **Level I.** Non-supervisory staff. These employees do not supervise other staff and are *not* ECF employees or covered under this appendix.
  - d. **Level II.** Supervisors. These ECF employees are all in supervisory and managerial positions reporting to a mid-level manager at the HPDM level III. Typically they are individuals having authority in the interest of the agency to hire, direct, assign, promote, reward, transfer, furlough, layoff, recall, suspend, discipline or remove employees, to adjust employees' grievances, or to effectively recommend such action, if the exercise of the authority is not merely routine or clerical in nature but requires the consistent exercise of independent judgment.

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e. **Level III.** Mid-level managers. These ECF employees generally are either supervisory or non-supervisory management employees reporting to an executive leader at the HPDM level IV. In health care facilities, mid-level managers would include Associate Chiefs of Staff, service chiefs, service/care line managers, Associate and Assistant Chief Nurses and nurse managers who report to nurse executives or care line managers, and organizationally equivalent senior staff positions such as the Staff Assistant to the Director and the Administrative Assistant to the Chief of Staff. Equivalent VISN and VHACO program office positions are normally at the GS-14 and title 38 equivalent levels.

f. **Level IV.** Executive leadership. These ECF employees are responsible for the overall functions and outcomes of an organization. They are either in the Senior Executive Service or are senior managers. In health care facilities, executive leaders would include Chiefs of Staff, Associate Directors (GS-15 and GS-14), Assistant Directors (GS-14), and nurse executive positions. Equivalent VISN and VHACO program office positions are normally at the GS-15 and title 38 equivalent levels.

g. **Performance Measure.** Quantitative measure used to evaluate and improve outcomes or the performance of functions and processes. Performance measures are most often used to define a specific performance requirement in quantitative terms.

h. **Performance Requirement.** Statement of the expectations or requirements established by management for critical, non-critical and additional performance elements at a particular achievement level.

## 5. GENERAL

a. **Performance Appraisal Period.** Generally, the ECF appraisal period is October 1 through September 30. The minimum performance appraisal period for employees covered by this appendix is 90 days.

b. **Performance Appraisal Form.** VA Form 3482e, VHA ECF Performance Appraisal Program, will be used to document the performance plan and appraise the performance of ECF employees in accordance with this appendix.

c. **Extension of Appraisal Period.** If an employee was initially appointed to the ECF after July 1, the appraisal period will be extended to allow for the minimum appraisal period, i.e. 90 days, not to exceed December 31. The appraisal period may also be extended under the special circumstances described in this appendix.

d. **Details and Temporary Promotions.** If an ECF employee is detailed or temporarily promoted to another position or assignment on September 30 and the employee has performed under communicated performance requirements for the minimum appraisal period, the employee may be assigned an annual rating based on either (1) performance in the temporary assignment; or (2) performance in his/her permanent position (assuming he/she performed under communicated standards for the minimum appraisal period during the year).

e. **Processing Timelines and Deadlines.** Specific instructions covering the timeframes for processing ECF performance appraisals and award recommendations that are not covered in this handbook or appendix will be issued annually by the Under Secretary for Health, or designee.

## **6. EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE FOLDER**

a. **Establishment and Maintenance.** An electronic Official Personnel Folder (eOPF) is established for employees and the servicing human resources offices will maintain the annual ECF performance ratings and awards in the performance folder located in the eOPF.

### **b. Content and Retention**

(1) Annual ratings of record documented on VA Form 3482e and all attachments to the form will be retained in the eOPF for 4 years after the date of the approved annual rating.

(2) At a minimum, the work plan and any written comments from the employee shall be attached to VA Form 3482e.

## **7. PERFORMANCE PLAN**

a. The Rater is responsible for communicating proposed performance elements and requirements and consulting with the employee and, if appropriate, the higher level supervisory official, on the plan's content. The Rater will provide a written performance plan to the employee as soon as possible (or in accordance with instructions issued by the Under Secretary for Health, or designee), but no later than 60 days after the beginning of the appraisal period, assignment to a new ECF position, or when a plan is changed.

b. Directors of Veterans Integrated Service Networks (VISNs), Chief Officers and Medical Center Directors will ensure that performance plans are in place for all ECF employees in accordance with the approved schedule for the rating period.

c. The performance plan will be based on the duties and responsibilities established for the position and will reflect responsibility for accomplishment of Departmental goals and objectives. The executive leadership's performance measures will cascade down to the ECF employees, as deemed applicable. Some ECF employees' performance standards may or may not include performance measures. However, all ECF employees' performance standards will address the HPDM core and key core competencies, along with any additional performance elements required at the Departmental level and/or developed locally.

d. The performance plan will adhere to the provisions set forth in VA Handbook 5013, Part I, paragraph 6.

## **8. MONITORING PERFORMANCE**

a. **Progress Review.** The Rater shall hold a progress review for each employee at least once during the appraisal period. At a minimum, an employee shall be informed of his/her performance by

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comparison with the elements, standards and/or performance measures, and performance requirements established for the position. The progress review should also be used as an opportunity to review employee performance plans.

**b. Unacceptable Performance in a Critical Element.** When performance is Unacceptable in one or more critical elements, the Rater must notify the employee in writing, afford the employee a reasonable opportunity to improve, and establish a performance improvement plan (PIP) as outlined in paragraph d below. The PIP shall include an opportunity to demonstrate acceptable performance in each critical element in which the employee's performance is Unacceptable. A reasonable opportunity to improve and PIP is provided prior to the assignment of a summary rating of Unacceptable, unless it is impractical, i.e., employee is no longer in the position, left the VA, etc. This opportunity to improve must be provided before action can be taken to involuntarily remove the ECF employee from his/her position through a reduction in grade or removal from Federal service. This requirement *does not apply to*:

(1) Title 38 ECF employees appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7401(1) whose performance constitutes a clear danger to self or others;

(2) Title 38 ECF employees who are temporary full-time, part-time, or without compensation under 38 U.S.C. 7405(a)(1)(A);

(3) Title 5, hybrid or title 38 employees serving an initial or supervisory probationary period who are not otherwise entitled under law or regulation. (**NOTE:** *Consult your local Regional Counsel or the Office of Human Resources Management in cases of probationary employees with prior Federal service. See VA Handbook 5021, Part II, regarding separation procedures for probationary title 38.*)

**NOTE:** *The reasonable opportunity to improve performance (PIP) is not required if an adverse action (or major adverse action) is to be proposed based on gross negligence or misconduct and not an Unacceptable performance rating. In those cases, the procedures outlined in VA Directive and Handbook 5021 apply.*

**c. Unacceptable Performance in a Non-Critical Element.** When performance is Unacceptable in one or more non-critical elements, the Rater must notify the ECF employee of the performance deficiencies in writing as soon as practical and must provide some form of assistance to the employee to achieve the Fully Successful level of performance in each non-critical element determined to be less than Fully Successful. This form of assistance does not require the formal PIP process outlined below. In addition, a summary rating of Minimally Satisfactory may be assigned prior to the assistance, as long as the Rater initiates the assistance in a timely manner.

**d. Performance Improvement Plan (PIP).** If it is determined that a formal opportunity to improve is required (due to unacceptable performance in a critical element) or warranted (at the discretion of the Rater to assist an employee's unacceptable performance in a non-critical element), the Rater shall notify the employee in writing of the following:

(1) Identify the element(s) for which performance is less than fully successful, including whether the element(s) is critical or non-critical.

- (2) Provide specific examples of the performance deficiencies for each element/standard determined to be less than fully successful;
- (3) Clarify performance expectation;
- (4) Indicate the length of the PIP to include the beginning and ending date. The length of the PIP will depend on the position of the employee, the nature of work and the deficiencies involved;
- (5) Identify what the employee must do to achieve the fully successful level for each element determined to be less than Fully Successful;
- (6) Identify how the employee's work will be monitored;
- (7) Establish a time and place for regular meetings with the supervisor and the employee to discuss the employee's progress;
- (8) Identify how the supervisor, or another individual, will be available to provide assistance if needed, i.e., answer questions, provide guidance or training, etc.; and
- (9) Describe other assistance that may be made available to the employee, if applicable.

## **9. RATING PROCESS**

- a. A rating is the written record of the appraisal of each critical and non-critical performance element and the assignment of a summary rating level by the Rater. This may also include a written evaluation of any *additional* elements, if such elements are used. However, *additional* elements are not used in determining a summary rating level. All ratings will be documented on VA Form 3482e. However, only annual ratings of record will be included in the employee's performance folder maintained in the eOPF.
- b. All ECF employees in the HPDM level IV, executive leadership level, will submit a self assessment at the end of each rating period. Other employees may voluntarily submit a self-assessment of their performance as measured against the approved performance plan. Self-assessments should be submitted to the Rater in accordance with the established schedule for the performance appraisal period or within 10 days of the end of the rating period if no other deadline is established.
- c. The Rater will assess the employee's accomplishment of each established performance element and prepare a written rating for each employee who has served under a performance plan for the minimum appraisal period of 90 days. If an achievement level other than Fully Successful is assigned for a particular performance element, specific examples supporting that level must be documented on the rating form (or attached). The employee's self assessment, if appropriate, may be used for this purpose.
- d. Based on the levels of achievement assigned for each performance element, the Rater will assign one of the five summary ratings levels as described in VA Handbook 5013, Part I, paragraph 8.

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e. The annual rating process, as well as any special ratings required during the appraisal period, i.e., employee changes positions or leaves the Department, shall be completed in accordance with the general provisions of part I of this handbook.

**10. ASSIGNMENT AND REVIEW OF ANNUAL RATING OF RECORD.** All employees who occupy an ECF position on September 30 will be rated in accordance with this appendix and part I of this handbook.

a. **Summary Rating of Fully Successful or Higher.** The Rater will complete the rating process described above and provide a copy of the performance appraisal with the summary rating to the employee. The employee will be allowed an adequate amount of time to review his/her appraisal and provide appropriate written comments to attach to VA Form 3482e. Normally, 3 workdays is considered an adequate period of time.

b. **Summary Rating of Minimally Satisfactory or Unacceptable.**

(1) The Rater will complete the rating process described above and provide a copy of the performance appraisal with the initial summary rating to the Approving Official for review and approval. (**NOTE: Only summary ratings that represent the rating of record at the end of the appraisal period require review by the Approving Official**). The Approving Official will either concur with the rating or assign a different rating. He/she may discuss with or request additional justification for the recommended performance rating from the Rater. If a different rating is assigned by the Approving Official, the performance-based reason for the change must be explained on the form. This explanation shall specify which achievement levels for which elements were changed and why.

(2) The approved appraisal form will be returned to the Rater for communication to the employee. The employee will be allowed an adequate amount of time to review his or her appraisal and provide appropriate written comments to attach to VA Form 3482e. Normally, 3 workdays is considered an adequate period of time.

(3) In cases where a Minimally Satisfactory rating was approved, the Rater must provide some form of assistance to the employee to achieve the Fully Successful level of performance in each non-critical element determined to be less than Fully Successful. This form of assistance is not required prior to assigning a rating but must be initiated in a timely manner (see paragraph 8c).

(4) In cases where an Unacceptable rating was approved, the Rater must provide a reasonable opportunity to improve and a PIP prior to the assignment of a summary rating, unless it is impractical, i.e., employee is no longer in the position, left the VA, etc., (see paragraph 8d). However, the reasonable opportunity to improve (PIP) is required prior to proposing an adverse action (or major adverse action for title 38) based on an Unacceptable rating *except* in instances involving the following categories of employees:

(a) Title 38 ECF employees appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7401(1) whose performance constitutes a clear danger to self or others;

(b) Title 38 ECF employees who are temporary full-time, part-time, or without compensation under 38 U.S.C. 7405(a)(1)(A);

(c) Title 5, hybrid or title 38 employees serving an initial or supervisory probationary period who are not otherwise entitled under law or regulation. (**NOTE:** *Consult your local Regional Counsel or the Office of Human Resources Management in cases of probationary employees with prior Federal service. See VA Handbook 5021, Part II, regarding separation procedures for probationary title 38 employees.*)

(5) The reasonable opportunity to improve performance (PIP) is not required if an adverse action (or major adverse action) is to be proposed based on gross negligence or misconduct and not an Unacceptable performance rating. In those cases, the procedures outlined in VA Directive and Handbook 5021 apply.

c. **Processing.** The appropriate human resources office will coordinate the processing of approved performance appraisals and ratings and assure that all reporting requirements and time frames are met.

## 11. REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION AND HIGHER LEVEL REVIEW

a. **Step 1.** ECF employees may submit a written request for reconsideration at a higher level. This written request must be submitted first to the Rater, or to the Approving Official if the rating required approval, within 15 calendar days after receiving the summary rating to give this individual the opportunity to reconsider the assigned rating. The Rater (or Approving Official) will consider the written request for reconsideration and provide a written response to the employee within 10 calendar days. If a different rating is assigned by the Rater (or Approving Official), the performance-based reason for the change must be explained on the form. This explanation shall specify which achievement levels for which elements were changed and why.

b. **Step 2.** After receipt of the Step 1 response, the ECF employee may submit a written request for reconsideration to the next higher level in the organization. This request must be submitted within 5 days of receipt of the Step 1 response. The request must include the employee's written comments in support of the reconsideration as well as the Rater's (or Approving Official's) written response from Step 1. The official performing the higher level review shall provide a written response to the employee within 10 calendar days. If a different rating is assigned by this official, the performance-based reason for the change must be explained on the form. This explanation shall specify which achievement levels for which elements were changed and why. This is the final administrative decision in this matter and is provided to ECF employees in lieu of the performance rating grievance process outlined in part I of this handbook, paragraph 11.

## 12. OTHER USES OF RATINGS AND RESULTS

a. **Employee Development.** The performance appraisal process can be part of the means of identifying employees' developmental needs. Supervisors may require, or employees may wish to have, an Individual Development Plan. This plan may be utilized in the narrative summary of the appraisal form.

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b. **Placement Actions.** Performance appraisals will be considered in placement actions to the extent that they demonstrate possession of the qualification requirements established for the position being filled.

c. **Reduction-in-Force (RIF).** The competitive procedures that form the basis of a RIF include performance, as set forth in VA Handbook 5005.]