

Senior Professional Performance Appraisal System

This Senior Professional Performance Appraisal System and Program applies to all Senior-Level (SL) and Scientific and Professional (ST) (Senior Professionals) covered by subchapter I of chapter 43 of title 5, United States Code.

This Senior Professional Performance Appraisal System and Program supersedes any conflicting provisions of subpart B of part 430 of title 5 of the Code of Federal Regulations and the *OPM Senior-Level and Scientific and Professional Desk Guide* (June 2023). The included performance plan shall be used by all Senior Professionals covered by subchapter I of chapter 43 of title 5, United States Code beginning in October 2025 (the first quarter of FY 2026). All Senior Professionals shall be appraised using this system no later than September 30, 2026.

I. Appraisal Period

Senior Professionals must be appraised at least annually based on their performance against the five (5) critical elements and performance standards and requirements, which must be aligned with the agency's organizational assessment for that same period. A rating of record must be assigned for the relevant period of performance for each year no later than December 31st.

- **Minimum Period.** The minimum period of performance that must be completed before a performance rating can be given is 90 days.
- **Extending the Appraisal Period.** If the agency cannot prepare a Senior Professional's performance rating at the end of the appraisal period because the Senior Professional has not completed the minimum appraisal period or for other reasons (e.g., when work assignments and responsibilities so warrant), the agency must extend the Senior Professional's appraisal period and will then prepare the rating of record as soon as practicable.

II. Monitoring Performance

Throughout the appraisal period, a supervisor must monitor the Senior Professional's performance in accomplishing elements and requirements and provide feedback. At least quarterly, supervisors and Senior Professionals must meet to discuss and document progress toward meeting the critical elements in the Senior Professional's performance plan.

III. Summary Performance Levels

The system includes five summary performance levels:

- Level 5 - Outstanding
- Level 4 - Great
- Level 3 - Satisfactory
- Level 2 - Needs improvement
- Level 1 - Unacceptable

A detailed description of the performance standards for each performance level is attached as Appendix 1.

IV. Planning Performance: Critical Elements and Performance Requirements

Supervisors must develop performance plans in consultation with the Senior Professionals and communicate the plans to them in writing, including through the use of automated systems, on or before the beginning of the appraisal period or upon initial appointment to a new SL or ST position. Each plan must include the following critical elements and performance requirements.

Each Senior Professional shall be evaluated on a scale of 1-5 based on the following mandatory critical elements and performance requirements for the relevant time period:

1. Faithful Support of Administration of the Law and the President's Policies. This is the most critical element for reviewing the job performance of someone who serves under the elected President. Faithful administration of one's role in the Executive Branch requires commitment to the principles of the Founding, including equality under the law and democratic self-government. All Senior Professionals must clearly and demonstrably support implementation of the President's policy priorities through specific results that align with and advance the President's specific policy agenda.

2. Government Efficiency. Senior Professionals must support and contribute to demonstrable improvements in efficiency, productivity, and quality of work and government services, including significant reductions in costs and paperwork.

3. Merit and Competence. Senior Professionals must consistently demonstrate outstanding proficiency and competence in the performance of their job duties. Such qualities will be evidenced by specific, demonstrable achievements and results that provide concrete benefits to American citizens. Senior Professionals must consistently produce work that is of the highest quality; handle challenges; exceed targets; and complete assignments in a timely manner. In consultation with the Senior Professional, the Rating Official must identify at least one competency from the list in Appendix 2 against which to evaluate the Senior Professional's performance on this Critical Element.

4. Partnership/Leadership/Mentorship. Senior Professionals should serve as trusted advisors, partners, leaders, and mentors at their agencies. In consultation with the Senior Professional, the Rating Official must identify at least one competency from the list in Appendix 3 against which to evaluate the Senior Professional's performance on this Critical Element.

5. Achieving Organizational Goals. The Senior Professional's performance rating must be aligned with agency's organizational assessment for the performance period. In addition, at least three performance objectives must be established for this critical element by the Rating Official in consultation with the Senior Professional that are tailored for the Senior Professional's specific function and role. They should focus on measurable targets, outputs and outcomes aligned to specific goals and objectives set forth for the agency in the President's Management Agenda, Agency Strategic Plan, Congressional Budget Justification/Annual Performance Plan, and other organizational planning documents. With the approval of agency leadership, they may also focus on specific program and policy objectives.

Each critical element must be assigned a weight, with the total weights adding to 100 points. Critical Element 1 must be assigned a weight of at least 25. Each of the remaining required critical elements set forth above must be assigned a weight of at least 15.

V. Deriving the Rating of Record

Critical Element Point Values. Once the rating for each critical element is determined, the following point values will be assigned to the element ratings:

- Level 5 = 5 points
- Level 4 = 4 points
- Level 3 = 3 points
- Level 2 = 2 points
- Level 1 = 0 points

Derivation Formula. The derivation formula is calculated as follows:

- If any critical element is rated Level 1 (Unacceptable), the rating of record is Unacceptable.
- If no critical element is rated Level 1 (Unacceptable), continue to the next step.

For each critical element, multiply the element rating level point value by the weight assigned to that element. Add the results from the previous step for each of the five critical elements to come to a total score (example below). Assign the rating of record using the ranges below:

- 475-500 = Level 5
- 400-474 = Level 4
- 300-399 = Level 3
- 200-299 = Level 2
- Any critical element rated Level 1 = Level 1

Critical Element	Critical Element Point Value	Weight	Element Score	Rating of Record Point Ranges
1	4	30	4 x 30 = 120	475-500 = Level 5 400-474 = Level 4 300-399 = Level 3 200-299 = Level 2 Any CE rated Level 1 = Level 1
2	5	15	5 x 15 = 75	
3	3	15	3 x 15 = 45	
4	4	25	4 x 25 = 100	
5	4	15	4 x 15 = 60	
Total		100 points	400	

Recommended Rating. The Rating Official will develop a recommended rating in writing and share the rating with the Senior Professional.

Opportunity for Written Response and Higher-Level Review. A Senior Professional may respond in writing to the recommended rating. Upon a Senior Professional's request, the agency must provide an opportunity for review of the recommended rating before the rating is presented to the agency-level Performance Review Board (PRB). An official providing higher-level review, or an alternative review may not change the Rating Official's recommended rating

but may recommend a different rating to the PRB. Copies of findings and recommendations by the higher-level official or the official performing an alternative review must be given to the Senior Professional, the Rating Official, and the PRB. A rating of record of Unacceptable (Level 1) must be reviewed and approved by a higher-level management official.

Distribution of Ratings. For agencies with four or more Senior Professionals, no more than 30% of total ratings shall be Level 4 or Level 5, unless the President waives this provision by certifying that the performance of the agency's Senior Professionals was outstanding during the relevant time period.¹

Job Changes or Transfers. When a Senior Professional who has completed the minimum appraisal period changes jobs or transfers to another agency, the Rating Official must prepare a performance rating to be forwarded to the gaining agency.

Transferred Ratings. When determining the rating of record for a Senior Professional who transferred from another agency during the appraisal cycle, the current Rating Official must consider any applicable performance ratings of the Senior Professional's performance received from the former agency.

Rating of Record. The rating of record must be assigned by the appointing authority (and may not be delegated to an official who does not have authority to make SL or ST appointments) only after considering the recommendations of the PRB. The rating of record must be communicated to the Senior Professional in writing, normally within 3 months of the end of the appraisal period.

Use of the Organizational Assessment in Senior Professional Performance Evaluations. At least annually the agency must assess organizational performance against goals from the President's Management Agenda, Agency Strategic Plan, Congressional Budget Justification/Annual Performance Plan, and other organizational planning documents. The agency must ensure its assessment results are communicated by the oversight official to Senior Professionals, rating officials, higher level review officials, PRB members, and approving officials at the conclusion of the appraisal period and before completion of the recommended ratings so that they may be used in Senior Professional performance appraisals, ratings and recommendations.

Pay Adjustments and Performance Awards. Senior Professionals who are rated a Level 4 or Level 5 are eligible to receive a performance award and/or upward performance-based pay adjustment up to and exceeding 5% of the Senior Professional's rate of basic pay. A Senior Professional whose performance was rated a Level 3 should receive a performance award up to 5% of the Senior Professional's rate of basic pay. A Senior Professional whose performance was rated a Level 1 or 2 will not receive any performance award or upward performance-based pay

¹ This requirement will only become effective after OPM has completed rulemaking to revise 5 C.F.R. § 430.208(c). Until that rulemaking is completed, agencies should treat the 30% cap on Levels 4 and 5 as general guidance for ensuring "performance evaluation results that make meaningful distinctions based on relative performance," 5 C.F.R. § 430.405(b)(1)(iii), and not a hard-and-fast rule or requirement.

adjustment. Pay adjustments and performance awards will be made within 5 months following the end of the applicable appraisal period.

VI. Performance Review Board (PRB)

PRB. The agency must make use of the agency-level Senior Executive Service (SES) PRB to make written recommendations on ratings of record, performance awards, and pay adjustments regarding Senior Professionals. The agency-level PRB will conduct the centralized review required by 5 CFR 534.507.

Agency/Organizational Performance. The PRB must be provided and take into account appropriate assessments of the agency/organization's performance when making recommendations regarding Senior Professionals.

VII. Dealing with Poor Performance

Consistent with Executive Order 14171, "Restoring Accountability to Policy-Influencing Positions Within the Federal Workforce," January 20, 2025, and OPM Memorandum, "Guidance on Revocation of Executive Order 14003," February 7, 2025, agencies should consider utilizing either performance-based or adverse action procedures when addressing poor performance.

Performance-based actions. If at any time during the performance appraisal period the supervisor determines a Senior Professional's performance is unacceptable in one or more critical elements, the supervisor shall provide the Senior Professional a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) that provides the Senior Professional 30 days to demonstrate acceptable performance. The PIP shall notify the Senior Professional of the critical element(s) for which performance is unacceptable and inform him or her of the performance standard(s), including specific measures, which must be attained to demonstrate acceptable performance in his or her position. The agency should also inform the employee that, unless his or her performance in the critical element(s) improves to and is sustained at an acceptable level, the employee may be removed. If the Senior Professional does not demonstrate acceptable performance within 30 days of receiving a PIP, the agency should promptly initiate action consistent with applicable law, regulation, and agency policy to remove or demote the Senior Professional.

Adverse actions. In contrast to a performance-based action, a supervisor's determination that a Senior Professional's performance is unacceptable need not be based on an established critical element or performance standard. Rather, the determination must be made that the assessment of the Senior Professional's performance is accurate and reasonable. Additionally, unreasonable or excessive delay in taking an adverse action based on unacceptable performance may have a significant negative impact on the agency pursuing discipline against a Senior Professional. Supervisors should, therefore, take prompt action when observing performance deficiencies.

VIII. Other System Requirements

Appraisal Results. Performance appraisals will be used as a basis for adjusting pay, granting awards, retaining and removing Senior Professionals, and making other personnel decisions.

Oversight. The agency head or the official designated by the agency head who provides organizational assessments and evaluation guidelines and is responsible to oversee the system and to certify: 1) the appraisal process makes meaningful distinctions based on relative performance; 2) Senior Professional ratings take into account assessments of organizational performance; and 3) pay adjustments, awards and pay levels based on the results of the appraisal process accurately reflect individual performance and/or contribution to agency performance. The responsible official designated to provide evaluation guidelines and oversee the appraisal system must do so for the entire executive agency.

IX. Training and Evaluation

Training. The agency will provide information and training to agency leadership, supervisors, and Senior Professionals on the requirements and operation of the agency's Senior Professional performance management system.

Communication of Results. The agency will communicate annually the distribution of ratings from the previous appraisal period and the average pay increases and awards associated with each rating level. Agencies must protect the privacy of the ratings received by individual Senior Professionals.

Evaluation. The agency will periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the performance appraisal system and implement improvements as needed.

Appendix 1- Performance Standards for Critical Elements

The performance standard for each critical element is specified below.

- **Level 5:** The Senior Professional demonstrates exceptional performance, directly contributes toward sustaining organizational excellence, and enhances the ability to achieve results in the Senior Professional's organization, agency, department or Governmentwide. This represents the highest level of Senior Professional performance.
- **Level 4:** The Senior Professional demonstrates a very high level of performance beyond that required for successful performance in the Senior Professional's position and scope of responsibilities. The Senior Professional consistently exceeds established performance expectations, timelines, or targets.
- **Level 3:** The Senior Professional demonstrates the high level of performance expected of Senior Professionals. The Senior Professional's actions contribute positively toward the achievement of project/program goals and meaningful results. The Senior Professional is effective, dependable and delivers high-quality project/program results.
- **Level 2:** The Senior Professional's performance is unsatisfactory and needs improvement. While the Senior Professional generally meets established performance expectations, timelines and targets, there are occasional lapses that impair operations and/or cause concern from management.
- **Level 1:** In repeated instances, the Senior Professional demonstrates performance deficiencies that detract from project/program goals and objectives. The Senior Professional routinely does not meet established performance expectations/timelines/targets and fails to produce – or produces unacceptable – work products, services, or outcomes.

Appendix 2: Criteria for Evaluation of Senior Professional Merit and Competence

In consultation with the Senior Professional, the Rating Official must review and select at least one of the competencies below that contribute to the Senior Professional's performance toward work assignments or responsibilities and will serve as a basis to evaluate the Senior Professional's merit and competence.

- Decision Making – Makes sound, well-informed, and objective decisions; perceives the impact and implications of decisions; commits to appropriate action, even in uncertain situations, to accomplish work assignments and applicable organizational goals.
- Financial Management – Understands the organization's financial processes. Prepares, justifies, and administers the project/program budget. Oversees procurement and contracting to drive government efficiency and advance the mission. Monitors expenditures and uses cost-benefit thinking to set priorities.
- Information Management – Identifies a need for and knows where or how to gather information; organizes and maintains information on information management systems; retrieves and applies information appropriately in various situations.
- Legal, Government and Jurisprudence – Knowledge of applicable laws, legal codes, court procedures, precedents, legal practices or documents, government regulations, executive orders, agency rules, government organization or functions, and/or the democratic political process as they apply to area of responsibility.
- Planning and Evaluating – Organizes work, sets priorities, and determines resource requirements; determines short- or long-term goals and strategies to achieve them; coordinates with other organizations or parts of the organization to accomplish goals; monitors progress and evaluates outcomes.
- Problem Solving – Identifies problems; determines accuracy and relevance of information; uses sound judgment to generate and evaluate alternatives, and to make recommendations.
- Project Management – Applies principles, methods, or tools for developing, scheduling, coordinating, monitoring, evaluating, and managing projects and resources, including technical performance.
- Reasoning – Identifies rules, principles, or relationships that explain facts, data, or other information; analyzes information and makes correct inferences or draws accurate conclusions.
- Research – Applies knowledge of the scientific principles, methods, and processes used to conduct a systematic and objective inquiry; including study design, collection, analysis, and interpretation of data; and the reporting of results.
- Technical Competence/Subject Matter Expertise – Uses knowledge that is acquired through formal training or extensive on-the-job experience to perform one's job; works with, understands, and evaluates technical information related to the job; advises others on technical issues.

Appendix 3: Criteria for Evaluation of Senior Professional Partnership/Leadership/Mentorship

In consultation with the Senior Professional, the Rating Official must review and select the competencies below that contribute to the Senior Professional's performance toward work assignments or responsibilities and will serve as a basis to evaluate the Senior Professional's Partnership/Leadership/Mentorship.

- Collaboration/Partnership – Encourages and facilitates cooperation and trust; fosters commitment; works with others to achieve goals. Engages with agency leaders, customers, and stakeholders to seek input (assess their needs, obtain information), resolve their problems, or satisfy their expectations.
- Leadership – Influences, motivates, and challenges others; adapts leadership styles to a variety of situations. Accepts leadership roles as appropriate. Conducts oneself in a manner that sets a positive example.
- Mentorship – Provides guidance, direction, and career advice through mentoring— either a standalone program, part of a training and development program within an organization, or individually.