

## **Performance Appraisal System Certification Reference Guide**

*This reference guide was prepared by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to provide summary information to senior agency leaders on the Senior Executive Service (SES) and Senior Level (SL) and Scientific and Professional (ST) certification process.*

### **SES/SL/ST Performance Management Checklist**

The following is a checklist of agency responsibilities that must be accomplished throughout the appraisal cycle to provide for effective performance management. For a more detailed look at these requirements as they relate to performance appraisal certification, please see the next page of this guide.

#### **Planning/Monitoring/Developing:**

- ❑ Conduct briefings/trainings early in the performance cycle to remind employees of the procedures and responsibilities included in the agency's performance appraisal system/program.
- ❑ Develop performance plans containing measurable results in consultation with senior employees and communicate the plans to them in a timely manner (see the next page of this guide for details on performance plans). All senior employees must be assigned to a performance plan.
- ❑ In addition to the required progress review(s), hold frequent, informal feedback sessions to discuss progress toward meeting goals and priorities established in performance plans.

#### **Rating:**

- ❑ At the end of the rating cycle and prior to rating a senior employee, communicate to senior employees, rating and reviewing officials, and Performance Review Board (PRB)/Senior Professional Review Panel (SPRP) members the results of the organizational assessment and guidelines for using the organizational results when recommending ratings, pay, and awards.
- ❑ Follow the procedures in your agency's appraisal system/program for assigning senior employees' performance ratings. All senior employees (including noncareer employees) must be rated at least annually.
- ❑ Ensure the PRB/SPRP reviews performance ratings and accompanying information, and makes written recommendations to the appointing authority regarding such ratings, performance-based pay adjustments and performance-based awards.

#### **Rewarding:**

- ❑ Ensure that senior employees who receive the highest annual summary rating (SES)/rating of record (SL/ST) receive the largest corresponding pay adjustments, performance awards, and levels of pay, separately; a total compensation approach is unacceptable for certification. This is one of the responsibilities of the Oversight Official (see the next page of this guide for details on Oversight Official responsibilities).
- ❑ Gain approval from the appointing authority on all final ratings, pay adjustments and awards. Communicate final ratings to senior employees in writing, which may include electronically.
- ❑ Timely process performance-based pay adjustments and awards for senior employees (see the next page of this guide for details on effective dates of pay adjustments and awards).
- ❑ Communicate the results of the previous appraisal period (i.e., overall ratings distribution, average performance-based pay adjustments, and average performance awards for each rating level) to all senior employees in writing.

## Fact Sheet of Detailed Certification Requirements

### Planning/Monitoring/Developing:

- **Performance Plans:** Performance plans must be issued on or before the beginning of the appraisal period for all agency SES members (including noncareer SES), and within 30 days of the beginning of the rating cycle for all agency SL/ST employees. Senior employees must be consulted in the development of their performance plans.
- **Aligned Results:** Each and every performance requirement/objective in the results-oriented critical element must 1) show clear, transparent alignment with organizational goals, 2) contain *at least* one main result and the applicable quality indicators for that result at the Fully Successful level, in compliance with 5 CFR 430.305(a)(1); other measures of quantity, timeliness and cost-effectiveness should be included as applicable, and 3) differentially identify the result(s) and applicable measure(s).

### Rating:

- **Organizational Assessment and Guidelines:** Prior to rating a senior employee, agencies must communicate to senior employees, rating and reviewing officials, and PRB/SPRP members the results of the organizational assessment and issue guidelines for using the organizational results when recommending ratings, pay, and awards.
- **Performance Distinctions:** The application of the appraisal system must result in meaningful distinctions based on relative performance; agencies must be able to justify senior employees' ratings using organizational performance results. A forced distribution of ratings is prohibited. All senior employees must be rated at least annually.
- **PRB/SPRP:** PRBs (SES) and SPRPs (for agencies with 10 or more SL/ST employees) must review initial performance ratings in consideration of organizational performance results, any responses to initial ratings and/or findings, and recommendations after a higher level review/alternative review. Additionally, the PRB/SPRP must make written recommendations (compliant with applicable law and regulations) to the appointing authority regarding performance ratings, performance-based pay adjustments and performance awards.
- **Oversight Official:** A high-level oversight official must ensure 1) application of the appraisal process results in meaningful distinctions in performance, 2) results of the appraisal process take into account the agency's organizational performance, and 3) pay levels, pay adjustments and performance awards are based upon the results of the appraisal process, accurately reflect the individual's performance and/or contribution to the agency's performance, and reflect proper pay differentiation.

### Rewarding:

- **Pay Policy:** Agencies must establish written policies addressing criteria for SES pay (5 CFR 534.404) and SES awards (5 CFR 534.405), and/or SL/ST pay (5 CFR 534.505) and SL/ST awards (5 CFR 451.101(e) and 451.104(a)).
- **Pay Differentiation:** Annual ratings, pay, and awards data must show senior employees who receive the highest annual summary ratings receive the largest corresponding pay adjustments, performance awards, and levels of pay, separately; a total compensation approach does not demonstrate compliance with the pay differentiation criterion. Additionally, ratings, pay and awards data cannot include any violations of laws, regulations, or limitations, and must include effective dates for pay adjustments and performance awards that support a pay-for-performance system—
  - For SES: Should have effective dates not later than 5 months after the end of the appraisal period
  - For SL/ST: Must make pay adjustments in accordance with the requirements in 5 U.S.C. 5303(a) – on the first day of the first pay period when the General Schedule is adjusted – and should pay performance awards as soon as practicable after the end of the appraisal period.
- **Communication of System Application Results:** The results of the previous appraisal period (i.e., overall ratings distribution, average pay adjustments, and average performance awards for each rating level) must be communicated to senior employees in writing.