NASA Procedural Requirements

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Subject: NASA Employee Performance Communication System (EPCS) - Change 6 (10/29/10)

Responsible Office: Office of Human Capital Management

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CHAPTER 5. Performance Appraisal Process

5.1 Performance Plan and Appraisal Forms

Standard Agency-wide performance plan and appraisal forms for supervisory and non-supervisory employees must be used by all Centers. Centers with an automated performance management system may develop automated forms provided the information does not deviate from the Agency-wide forms.

5.2 Performance Planning

5.2.1 The Rating Official must:

5.2.1.1 Establish a written, or otherwise recorded, performance plan for each employee. Normally, these plans shall be established within 30 days of the beginning of the appraisal period or within 30 days of an employee's assignment to a position or to a set of duties.

5.2.1.2 Offer an employee the opportunity to provide input into his/her performance plan. Before finalizing a performance plan, the Rating Official must provide a draft of the plan to the employee and give the employee an opportunity to provide input/feedback. However, the Rating Official shall make the final decision on the performance elements and standards to be included in the plan.

5.2.2 Performance plans:

5.2.2.1 To establish the required alignment with the Agency's Strategic Plan, must identify the performance goals and objectives of the employee's organization for the appraisal period to which he/she will contribute in order. It is expected that responsibility for specific organizational goals and objectives follows the chain of authority within an organization (i.e., from senior executive to manager to supervisor to employee). During the planning phase, it is the responsibility of the Rating Official to discuss with the employee how the individual performance elements and standards are aligned with and support achieving of the organization's goals and objectives.

5.2.2.2 For supervisory employees, must include the performance elements and standards identified in Appendix A.

5.2.2.2.1 These performance elements and standards are the minimum requirements.

5.2.2.2.2 Both elements are critical.

5.2.2.2.3 The PPFO element must link to and support achieving the organization's goals and objectives.

5.2.2.3 For nonsupervisory employees, must include the performance elements and standards identified in Appendix B.

5.2.2.3.1 These performance elements and standards are the minimum requirements.

5.2.2.3.2 The elements may be either critical or non-critical. However, the PPFO element must be critical and link to and support achieving the organization's goals and objectives.

5.2.2.4 For team leaders, program managers, and other similar nonsupervisory positions when determined applicable by the Rating Official, may include one or more of the performance sub-elements and standards from the Supervisory Competencies element (Appendix A).

5.2.2.5 At the discretion of the Rating Official, may include additional performance elements and standards that are specific and relative to the employee's duties.

5.2.2.6 When an employee will be matrixed to one or more projects or detailed to another position outside of the direct supervision and control of the supervisor of record (Rating Official) for 90 days or more, refer to paragraph 5.5.1.

5.2.2.7 Typically, should not have more than eight elements including the minimum requirements as stated in paragraphs 5.2.2.2 and 5.2.2.3.

5.2.3 The performance elements identify the expected results stated in very broad terms. Therefore, each element must include a number of performance standards in sufficient detail for the employee to understand what is expected of him/her. Performance standards:

5.2.3.1 Must be written at the Meets Expectations level, commensurate with the knowledge and skills required by the position. The performance standards must be challenging and significant in their expected results and must require the employee to consistently and reliably perform all the duties of the position with no greater level of supervision than is described by the position description.

5.2.3.2 Must identify the measures (e.g., quality, quantity, timeliness, cost-effectiveness) that will be used to evaluate the performance results.

5.2.3.3 Should guide the Rating Official/employee discussion about performance expectations during the performance-planning stage and the discussion about the employee's performance and accomplishments during a progress review and the annual appraisal.

5.2.4 At any time during the appraisal period, when necessary and with the agreement of the Rating Official and employee, a performance plan may be modified to reflect a change(s) to the performance requirements of the position.

5.2.5 No higher-level review of performance plans is required at this phase of the performance management process.

5.3 Performance Monitoring

5.3.1 The EPCS emphasizes ongoing communication and constructive feedback about performance between the Rating Official and the employee (including employees who are matrixed to one or more projects or detailed to another position) throughout the appraisal period, and each has a responsibility to keep the other informed. Such feedback may be provided by a Rating Official in his/her informal and/or formal day-to-day communication with an employee, individually, or as a member of a team and by an employee through his/her informal communication, verbally or via e-mail, and/or written status reports on the programs/projects he/she is working on.

5.3.2 At a minimum, one progress review must be held during the appraisal period, generally at midpoint in the period (refer to paragraph 4.7). Either a Rating Official or an employee may initiate a progress review at any time during the appraisal period.

5.3.3 A Rating Official must offer an employee an opportunity to provide input on his/her accomplishments relative to the performance elements and standards for his/her progress review. Documentation, either written or otherwise recorded, is required to indicate that the review was held. Additional documentation is required in cases where the Rating Official is concerned that the employee's performance is deficient and does not meet the performance standards for an element. Employees shall be given an opportunity to respond to any performance deficiency documented by the Rating Official.

5.3.4 Center Human Resources Offices shall annually certify to the Director, Workforce Management and Development Division, no later than November 30 or six months after the beginning of the appraisal period, that midpoint progress reviews have been held. The certifications shall identity the number of employees covered by this NPR and the percentage of those employees who received a midpoint review and describe the method used to make and support this determination.

5.4 Performance Assessing

5.4.1 A written, or otherwise recorded, Rating of Record must be given to an employee as soon as practicable after the end of the appraisal period (generally within 30 days) (refer to paragraph 4.11).

5.4.2 A Rating of Record shall be prepared only if the employee has served under a performance plan at least 90 days during the appraisal period. When a Rating of Record cannot be prepared at the end of the appraisal period, the appraisal period shall be extended for the amount of time necessary to meet the minimum period, at which time a Rating of Record shall be prepared.

5.4.3 Each employee must be appraised on each element in the performance plan on which the employee has had an opportunity to perform. An element shall be left unrated (i.e., Not Rated) only if the employee has had an insufficient opportunity to demonstrate performance on the element, in which case, the appraisal form shall be so annotated.

5.4.4 An employee's refusal to sign his/her Rating of Record shall not preclude it from being a final rating. In such instances, the Rating of Record shall be annotated to indicate the employee's refusal to sign, signed, and dated by the Rating Official.

5.4.5 Employee, Customer, and Other Perspectives

5.4.5.1 A Rating Official may consult with other sources (e.g., customers and peers) for feedback to be considered in appraising an employee's performance.

5.4.5.2 For supervisory employees, the Rating Official must seek and consider employees' perspectives when appraising a supervisor's performance. The Rating Official may use formal mechanisms such as surveys or less formal mechanisms such as solicited/unsolicited customer and employee feedback and analysis of personnel data to gather employee and, if applicable, customer perspectives when evaluating and appraising these employees.

5.4.5.3 When an employee will be matrixed to one or more projects or detailed to another position or to a set of duties outside of the direct supervision and control of the supervisor of record (Rating Official) for 90 days or more, refer to paragraphs 5.5.2 and 5.5.3.

5.4.6 Performance Element Rating Levels

5.4.6.1 Significantly Exceeds Expectations. Performance that consistently exceeds the performance standards to an exceptional degree for the element.

5.4.6.2 Exceeds Expectations. Performance that consistently exceeds the performance standard to a high degree for the element.

5.4.6.3 Meets Expectations. Performance that fully and consistently meets the performance standards identified for the element.

5.4.6.4 Needs Improvement. Performance that does not fully meet the performance standards for the element.

5.4.6.5 Fails to Meet Expectations. Performance that fails to meet the performance standards for the element.

5.4.7 A Rating Official must offer an employee the opportunity to provide input, relative to his/her performance elements and standards, on his/her accomplishments during the appraisal period. The employee shall be strongly encouraged to assume responsibility for identifying specific accomplishments and results (with examples) relative to his/her performance elements and standards. The employee's input must be retained as part of the appraisal documentation in the Employee Performance File.

5.4.8 Performance Summary Rating Levels

5.4.8.1 Distinguished (Level 5). Performance when all elements are rated Significantly Exceeds Expectations.

5.4.8.2 Accomplished (Level 4). Performance when all elements are rated no lower than Exceeds Expectations.

5.4.8.3 Fully Successful (Level 3). Performance when no element is rated below Meets Expectations.

5.4.8.4 Needs Improvement (Level 2). Performance when any element is rated below Meets Expectations.

5.4.8.5 Unacceptable (Level 1). Performance when any critical element is rated Fails to Meet Expectations.

5.4.9 A narrative summary that documents the overall performance of the employee is required for all performance summary rating levels; it must clearly and completely justify the rationale for the performance summary rating level assigned.

5.4.9.1 A performance summary rating of Distinguished, Needs Improvement, or Unacceptable must be reviewed and approved by a higher-level official (Reviewing Official). Center Directors and Officials-in-Charge of Headquarters Offices may act as both the Rating and Reviewing Official for this purpose.

5.5 Detailed or Matrixed Employees

5.5.1 When an employee will be matrixed to one or more projects or detailed to another position or to a set of duties

outside of the direct supervision and control of the supervisor of record (Rating Official) for 90 days or more, the supervisor of record must confer with the Project Manager(s) or the supervisor responsible for defining the duties and assignments of the detail to determine if any additional performance elements or standards related to the project(s) or detailed position/set of duties need to be added to the employee's performance plan. The employee must be given an opportunity to provide input to any additional performance elements or standards.

5.5.2 When an employee is or has been matrixed to one or more projects outside of the direct supervision and control of the supervisor of record (Rating Official) for 90 days or more, the Rating Official must consult with the Project Manager(s) or others, as appropriate, for feedback to be considered in appraising the employee's performance on the elements and standards relative to the matrixed assignment established in the employee's performance plan.

5.5.3 When an employee is or has been detailed to another position or to a set of duties outside of the direct supervision and control of the supervisor of record (Rating Official) for 90 days or more, the supervisor responsible for defining the duties and assignments of the detail must provide, in writing, to the Rating Official an assessment of the employee's performance on the elements and standards relative to the detailed assignment established in the employee's performance plan. The assessment must be retained as part of the appraisal documentation in the Employee Performance File.

5.5.4 Any feedback on or written assessment of an employee's performance provided in accordance with paragraphs 5.5.2 or 5.5.3 above must be taken into consideration by the Rating Official for the midterm progress review and when appraising and rewarding the employee at the end of the appraisal period.

5.6 Position Changes/Transfers

5.6.1 When an employee transfers to another position within NASA prior to the end of the appraisal period and has served under a performance plan for at least 90 days, the Rating Official (losing supervisor) shall complete an appraisal form assessing the employee's achievements up to the date of the transfer. No performance summary rating level shall be assigned; therefore, this appraisal is not a Rating of Record. This assessment of the employee's performance shall be provided to the employee and the gaining supervisor of the position to which the employee is transferring and shall be taken into consideration by the Rating Official when appraising the employee at the end of the appraisal period.

5.6.2 When an employee transfers to another Government agency at any time during the appraisal period, NASA must transfer to the gaining agency all performance ratings of record of the employee that are four years old or less, including the performance plan on which the most recent Rating of Record was based, in accordance with 5 C.F.R. S 293.405(a).

5.6.3 When a Rating Official leaves his/her position prior to the end of the appraisal period, he/she shall complete an appraisal form for each employee assessing the employee's achievements up to the date of the Rating Official's departure from the position. No performance summary rating level shall be assigned; therefore, this appraisal is not a Rating of Record. This assessment of each employee's performance shall be provided to the employee and the incoming supervisor and shall be taken into consideration by the Rating Official when appraising the employee at the end of the appraisal period. The Reviewing Official shall be held accountable for ensuring that the Rating Official completes the appraisals before he/she leaves.

5.6.4 In the event that either of the situations described in paragraphs 5.6.1 or 5.6.3 occur within 90 calendar days prior to the end of the appraisal period, the appraisal prepared for that purpose may be designated, at the discretion of the gaining or incoming supervisor (Rating Official), as the Rating of Record after determining a performance summary rating level provided the employee has served under the performance plan for at least 90 days. In such cases, the appraisal shall be retained in the Employee Performance File.

5.7 Performance Review Process

5.7.1 Center Directors and the Assistant Administrator for Infrastructure and Administration shall implement a performance review process(es) to:

5.7.1.1 Establish and communicate expectations at the beginning of the appraisal period for individual and organizational performance.

5.7.1.2 Establish and communicate expectations at the end of the appraisal period for the differentiation in performance ratings as well as award determinations (i.e., highest performance summary ratings and monetary awards and nonmonetary recognition are given to the top performers).

5.7.1.3 Ensure fairness and consistency in the appraising and rewarding of employees (i.e., must be able to demonstrate alignment between achievements and performance summary ratings for the appraisal period and corresponding monetary awards and/or non-monetary recognition).

5.7.2 The performance review process(es) must be completed before performance summary ratings are finalized and performance appraisals and ratings of record are discussed by Rating Officials with employees.

5.7.3 Center Human Resources Offices shall report annually, on the date determined by the Director, Workforce Management and Development Division, the process(es) utilized to ensure the alignment of performance award amounts to performance summary ratings and shall be able to demonstrate such alignment.

5.8 Awards Eligibility

5.8.1 An employee who receives a performance summary rating of Distinguished, Accomplished, or Fully Successful is eligible for an annual monetary performance award and nonmonetary recognition, based on the rating; however, eligibility does not equate to entitlement; there is no entitlement to an award.

5.8.2 An employee who receives a Needs Improvement or Unacceptable performance summary rating is not eligible for a monetary award or nonmonetary recognition, based on performance.

5.8.3 An award and award amount determination must be linked to an employee's performance.

5.8.4 A Quality Step Increase shall be considered the highest monetary performance award an employee can receive (see paragraph 5.9); and therefore, no other award (monetary, i.e., lump-sum cash, and/or nonmonetary, i.e., time-off) shall be given in conjunction with a QSI based on the same performance summary rating.

5.8.5 An employee with a higher performance summary rating level (e.g., Distinguished) must receive a greater monetary performance award, based on a percentage of salary, than an employee with a lower performance summary rating level (e.g., Accomplished).

5.8.5.1 To achieve fairness and consistency in the differentiation of award determinations, based on performance ratings, the Center Director and Assistant Administrator for Infrastructure and Administration (or designee) shall annually establish, based on the awards budget, guidelines (e.g., percentage/range of percentage of salary) for monetary performance awards applicable to Distinguished, Accomplished, and Fully Successful performance summary ratings.

5.8.5.2 These guidelines must be consistently applied to all performance awards, based on ratings of record for the appraisal period, for all employees covered by this NPR.

5.8.5.3 As an exception to paragraph 5.8.5.2 above, if an employee is promoted during the appraisal period and the promotion resulted in an increase in pay, the employee may receive a lesser award than that assigned for the employee's performance summary rating level. The promotion and increase in pay may be considered, in part, as resulting from the employee's performance and, therefore, as an award based on the employee's performance summary rating.

5.8.5.4 When a Time-Off Award is granted in recognition of an employee's performance summary rating, the monetary value of a Time-Off Award shall be calculated and included in the percentage of salary designated for the respective performance summary rating level.

5.8.6 All performance awards must be processed in accordance with Appendix C of NPR 3451.1, NASA Awards and Recognition Program.

5.9 Quality Step Increase (QSI)

5.9.1 A QSI is not required but may be granted to an employee who receives a performance summary rating of Distinguished in accordance with 5 C.F.R. S 531.504. Recommendations for QSIs shall be processed in accordance with Appendix C of NPR 3451.1, NASA Awards and Recognition Program.

5.9.2 A QSI must be effected within 120 calendar days following the end of the appraisal period. No QSIs may be effected more than 120 days after the end of the appraisal period on which the Distinguished rating was based.

5.9.3 When a QSI is granted, no other award (monetary, i.e., lump-sum cash, and/or nonmonetary, i.e., time-off) shall be given in conjunction with a QSI.

5.10 Reduction in Force (RIF)

Service credit for performance shall be computed in accordance with 5 C.F.R. S 351.504(e) and NPR 3351.1, Reduction in Force for NASA Employees.

5.11 Promotions

A performance appraisal shall be one factor used in determining whether or not to promote an employee. (See NPR 3335.1, Internal Placement of NASA Employees, for further guidance on promotions.)

5.12 Within-Grade Increase (WIG)

5.12.1 An employee whose current Rating of Record is at the Fully Successful performance summary rating level or higher is performing at an Acceptable Level of Competence (ALOC) for purposes of a WIG.

5.12.2 Failure to attain/maintain an ALOC justifies, and will result in the denial of, a WIG.

5.13 Failure to Meet Performance Expectations

5.13.1 At any time during the appraisal period that an employee's performance Needs Improvement or Fails to Meet Expectations in one or more elements of his/her position, management should take appropriate action to address such performance.

5.13.1.1 When it is determined that an employee's performance Fails to Meet Expectations in one or more critical elements, management must take corrective action to improve the employee's performance. The employee must be placed on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) and given a reasonable opportunity (a minimum of 30 days) to demonstrate acceptable performance. If after a reasonable opportunity to improve, an employee fails to raise performance in a critical element to an acceptable level, then action must be taken to remove the employee from that position (5 C.F.R. S 432) (refer to NPR 3432.1, Performance Based Reduction in Grade or Removal Actions).

5.13.1.2 When it is determined that an employee's performance Needs Improvement or Fails to Meet Expectations in one or more non-critical elements, management should address the need for improvement. However, no formal action, as specified in paragraph 5.13.1.1 above, is required.

5.13.2 If an employee expresses the need for an accommodation because of a disability after a performance-based action has been initiated, management must consider the request in accordance with NPR 3713.1, Procedures for Providing Reasonable Accommodation for Individuals with Disabilities.

5.14 Appraisal Disagreements

5.14.1 Employees are encouraged to have ongoing discussions with their Rating Officials regarding good, as well as poor, performance.

5.14.2 An employee who disagrees with the Rating of Record may request reconsideration by the Rating Official or, in the case of a disagreement with a performance summary rating of Distinguished, Needs improvement, or Unacceptable that must be reviewed and approved by a higher-level official, the Reviewing Official or in accordance with any local labor-management negotiated agreement. A reconsideration request must be made no later than 15 days after the employee is given a copy of the completed Rating of Record. When reconsideration is requested, the employee shall be given the opportunity to present information supporting the request and shall receive a decision within a reasonable period of time (e.g., 15 days). (Note: A reconsideration request at this stage substitutes for the informal procedure as outlined in NPR 3771.1, Grievance System.)

5.14.3. If the employee is dissatisfied with the reconsideration decision, he/she may formally grieve concerning the Rating of Record in accordance with NPR 3771.1, Grievance System, or any local labor-management negotiated agreement, if appropriate.

5.15 Linkage to SES Performance Management System

The performance results of non-SES supervisors and nonsupervisory employees shall be considered in the performance evaluation of SES managers and executives.

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