U.S. Office of Personnel Management

Quick Guide: Understanding Changes to Federal Performance Management

What Are the Major Changes under This Final Rule?

- Employee performance ratings will be standardized to promote and distinguish high performance.
- 'Minimally Successful' ratings are no longer available.
- Ratings may not be challenged through formal negotiated grievance procedures; however, agencies may develop an administrative process for rating review request.
- Mandatory critical element measuring supervisors' responsibilities for demonstrating effective performance management practices.
- Biennial review and certification of agency performance appraisal systems by OPM.

Why Are These Changes Being Made?

The Federal Government is strengthening its approach to performance management to improve the accuracy and credibility of performance ratings, reinforce accountability throughout the performance management process, and strengthen OPM's oversight of agency appraisal systems.

The goal is to ensure that performance ratings accurately reflect employee contributions and are supported by evidence, measurable accomplishments, and demonstrated results.

What Is Not Changing?

The accurate evaluation of job performance remains the foundation of performance appraisal. Performance ratings will continue to be based on actual employee performance.

Employees will continue to:

- Have performance plans that establish clear, job-related expectations.
- Receive regular performance feedback from supervisors.
- Be evaluated based on their actual performance against established performance standards, critical elements, and expectations.
- Participate in progress reviews and performance discussions.

- Have opportunities to document accomplishments and contributions.

What is Standardized Distribution and How Will Its Implementation Affect Performance Appraisals?

Standardized distribution is a calibration-based approach that creates a performance management system that is fair, transparent, and consistently applied. Calibration is a structured review process in which agency leaders review individual performance across work units to ensure similar levels of performance receive similar ratings.

The updated regulations place greater emphasis on:

- Evidence-based performance and demonstration of accomplishment.
- Alignment between individual contributions and organizational success.
- Calibration of ratings across organizations and/or agency.
- Greater differentiation between levels of performance.

The purpose of a standardized distribution is not to predetermine ratings or replace rigorous performance appraisal. Instead, the use of a standardized distribution will help agencies ensure that performance ratings accurately reflect distinctions in performance across the agency.

Standardized distributions help agencies distinguish exceptional performance from successful performance in a consistent and transparent manner.

How Organizational Performance Fits In

Federal employees contribute broadly to organizational goals and mission outcomes. While individual performance remains the primary basis for performance ratings, agencies must also consider how individual contributions support organizational success at all levels.

Examples may include:

- Improving customer service.
- Increasing efficiency.
- Reducing risk.
- Enhancing compliance.

Employees who demonstrate strong individual performance while making meaningful contributions to organizational success help advance agency goals and improve service to the public. These exceptional performers should be recognized and meaningfully rewarded.