

Performance Appraisal – Programs
Ref: OPM Performance-Management-FAQS

1. [What's the difference between an appraisal system and an appraisal program?](#)

An appraisal system describes the general policies and parameters for the administration of performance appraisal programs in the agency. An appraisal program is the specific procedures, methods, and requirements for planning, monitoring, and rating performance. Programs have to be designed within the boundaries of the system but can be tailored to the needs of the organization.

2. [How long does my supervisor have to be in his/her position before he/she can rate me?](#)

Governmentwide regulations do not specify a minimum amount of time a supervisor must be on the job before he/she may rate an employee. Agency performance appraisal programs may require a minimum amount of time the supervisor must be on the job before rating an employee.

3. [Who has the authority to assign a rating of record to an employee?](#)

Governmentwide performance management regulations do not specifically designate who has the authority to assign a rating of record. The agency will determine who has this authority.

4. [Can a program include more than one pattern of summary levels for ratings of record?](#)

No. Each program must use a single pattern of summary levels. To use different summary patterns, agencies must define separate programs and employee coverage to which a single pattern applies. However, more than one program can use the same summary pattern.

5. [Can an agency develop more than one appraisal program?](#)

Yes. Agencies can authorize the development of separate appraisal programs under the framework of their appraisal system. This would allow their various subcomponents or subpopulations to determine how best to address their needs and cultures and more effectively manage individual and organizational performance by tailoring specific appraisal procedures and requirements to mission and work technology.

6. [Can a rating of record ever be given at a time other than the end of the appraisal period?](#)

Yes. Governmentwide regulations define a rating of record as the performance rating completed at the end of the appraisal period that reflects performance over the entire period, or an off-cycle rating of record given when a within-grade increase (WGI) decision is not consistent with the employee's most recent rating

of record and a more current rating of record must be prepared. These are the only times that a rating of record can be issued.

7. [Does an employee have to have a performance rating or a rating of record of Unacceptable before a performance-based action can be taken?](#)

No. Both a performance rating and a rating of record involve the evaluation of an employee's performance against all the elements and standards in the performance plan. At any time during the appraisal period, an agency can make the determination that an employee's performance is unacceptable on one or more critical elements. This determination is sufficient to begin the process that could lead to a performance-based action if the employee's performance fails to improve to an acceptable level.

8. [What is the difference between the minimum period and the appraisal period?](#)

The minimum period is the shortest length of time established by the agency that an employee must perform under assigned elements and standards before a performance rating can be prepared. The appraisal period is length of time designated by the agency (usually one year) that is the basis for the rating of record.

9. [Does OPM have to review and approve all of the agency's appraisal programs?](#)

No. OPM must review and approve the agency's appraisal system, which sets out the limits within which all the agency's programs must be developed. OPM must approve the appraisal system before any appraisal program developed under the system can be implemented.

10. [Does an agency have to involve its employees in developing appraisal programs, award programs, and employee performance plans?](#)

Agencies are encouraged to involve employees in the design and implementation of their appraisal programs, award programs, and employee performance plans. Of course, where a union has been granted exclusive recognition, such involvement for bargaining unit employees must be through their elected union representatives.

11. [May an agency use assessments and measures other than ratings of record to make personnel decisions?](#)

Yes. Agencies may use any procedures they deem appropriate for considering performance when granting awards and taking other personnel actions, with the following exceptions: assigning additional service credit in a reduction in force and granting within-grade increases for General Schedule employees and prevailing rate system employees, which are tied to ratings of record and performance ratings respectively.

12. [How long does the minimum period have to be?](#)

An agency program must specify the length of its [minimum period](#) and that minimum must fall within any limits established by the agency appraisal system. When an agency decides to use the minimum period as the length of the opportunity period, the minimum period is one of the program features that may be subject to third-party review. Agencies are advised to be careful in determining the time limits to be used and avoid setting minimum periods that might be judged unreasonably short.

13. [What happens to a performance-based action if an agency changes its appraisal program while the action is still in progress?](#)

If a notice of proposed action has been given to the employee, a change to an appraisal program should have no effect on the action. Regulations contain a specific provision, called the "savings provision," that safeguards administrative procedures pending under a previously approved appraisal program, from being disrupted by the implementation of new programs covered by these regulations. OPM's system approval procedures require agency appraisal programs to have a similar provision to safeguard pending administrative procedures when programs change.

14. [Should there be performance management training for rating officials?](#)

Yes. OPM regulations require agencies to train rating officials on performance management topics (including developing performance plans, providing feedback, appraising and rewarding performance).

15. [Can an agency exclude temporary employees from its performance appraisal system?](#)

Yes. Provided the temporary employees meet the Governmentwide requirements. An agency may exclude an employee who: is serving in a position under a temporary position for less than 1 year, agrees to serve without a performance evaluation, and will not be considered for a reappointment or for an increase in pay based in whole or in part on performance.

16. [Can an agency request that OPM exclude certain groups of employees from the appraisal requirements in Governmentwide regulations?](#)

Yes, for excepted service positions only. OPM has the authority to exclude positions not in the competitive service from the requirements when requested by the head of the agency.

17. [How should an agency transition between appraisal programs?](#)

Ideally, an agency would close out the current appraisal period and issue ratings of record at the time specified under the existing appraisal program and then begin the next appraisal period under the terms of the new program.

18. [Does a program have to use the same number of levels to appraise elements and to assign ratings of record?](#)

No. The level designators (Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, Level 4, Level 5) described in Governmentwide regulations address summary levels only. An agency appraisal program can be designed to appraise elements using a mix of rating levels. For example, critical elements might be appraised at five levels and non-critical elements appraised as pass/fail. A methodology for deriving a summary rating must be in place, however. Agencies have flexibility to determine how their elements are appraised and their particular program design choices that agencies and their subcomponents make should reflect their own situations and needs.

19. [Can an agency assume that most employees are performing at an acceptable level \(i.e., rate by exception\)?](#)

No. The statute requires that each employee be appraised against his or her performance standard(s). It does not allow for appraising an employee by "presuming" that an employee is meeting performance standards. For the same reason, the process for appraising employees described by the regulations does not provide for any "assumed" levels of performance.

20. [If an agency is in the middle of the appraisal period and decides to change the number of summary levels used in its appraisal program, is it required to end the current period and give employees a rating of record?](#)

No. Regulations do not require that the appraisal period be ended to change appraisal programs. However, agencies need to remember that the regulations permit only a single rating of record in a given appraisal period.

21. [Does an agency have to complete the current appraisal period \(or rating cycle\) before changing the number of summary levels?](#)

Technically, no. However, agencies need to consider carefully the effect that switching to a different pattern of summary levels may have on employee expectations regarding performance appraisal results and their related consequences. Such expectations are established at the beginning of the appraisal period.

22. [What distinguishes one program from another?](#)

At a minimum, these four features must have a single definition for each program:

- employee coverage
- appraisal period length
- pattern of summary levels for ratings of record
- summary level derivation method

If multiple definitions are intended for any one of these features, separate programs must be established.

23. [What is the maximum length allowable for appraisal periods?](#)

The regulations specify that appraisal periods shall generally be designated so that employees are provided a rating of record annually. Agencies may establish different appraisal cycles (starting and ending dates) for different employees under the same appraisal period.

24. [Is the pattern of summary levels an appraisal program uses negotiable?](#)

No. The number of summary levels is an exercise of management rights and not subject to collective bargaining. However, where the agency system permits some flexibility in deciding about a program's pattern of summary levels, employee involvement could play an important role in program acceptance.

25. [What should an agency consider in establishing the length of its appraisal period?](#)

Agencies must look at the nature of the work done by various organizations and determine what length of time is appropriate as the basis for measuring employee performance. Agencies are encouraged to designate a single appraisal period (i.e., 1 year) as the standard appraisal period throughout the agency, with the built-in flexibility to accommodate individual or mass transitions between programs. Otherwise, an agency system must define any limits (maximum length, minimum length, or acceptable range) within which it will permit appraisal programs to select their appraisal periods.

26. [Can one agency subcomponent use two summary levels and others use three or more \(up to five\)?](#)

Yes. So long as the applicable agency performance appraisal system provides for it, subcomponent programs may use any pattern of summary levels permitted by Governmentwide regulation. OPM cautions agencies and their subcomponents to ensure that their applicable performance appraisal programs explicitly state the pattern used, including their numeric rating-level designators and equivalent terms.

27. [Should agencies provide training to their employees if there is a change made to the awards program?](#)

Yes. If an agency changes its awards program, it should provide appropriate training so employees and managers are aware of how the program is intended to operate. In addition, performance management training, which includes rewarding employees, should be conducted on a regular basis. OPM recommends that agencies train or retrain employees and supervisors on awards and performance appraisal programs regularly, particularly when the agencies' programs change or they have new employees or managers.

28. [Can agencies involve representatives of professional and management associations in developing programs?](#)

Yes. OPM encourages agencies to involve all employees, including managers and supervisors.

29. [An agency has varying performance appraisal cycles. If it gives a rating of record to those employees who have completed their minimum period when a program and summary level pattern change, what happens to those who haven't completed the minimum period?](#)

Agencies may not prepare performance ratings, including ratings of record, for employees who have not completed the minimum period. Therefore, an agency may choose to phase in the implementation of its new program to allow organizations with such employees to wait until the minimum periods are completed. If the agency waits for completion of applicable minimum periods before converting, a rating of record with its summary level could be assigned under the old program.