

**SUPERVISOR'S GUIDE
TO THE
PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT
AND
APPRAISAL PROCESS**

**West Virginia Division of Personnel
Employee Relations Section**

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DISCLAIMER

This booklet is intended to be used as a reference and procedural guide to the performance management and appraisal process. The general information it contains should not be construed to supercede any law, rule, or policy. In the case of any inconsistencies, the statutory and regulatory provisions shall prevail.

For technical assistance concerning specific situations, employers may contact the Division of Personnel's Employee Relations Section at (304) 558-3950, Extension 511.

SUPERVISOR'S GUIDE TO THE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND APPRAISAL PROCESS

I. INTRODUCTION

To accomplish the multiple goals of performance appraisals, most organizations are leaning toward a continuous program of performance management that is very important to both the professional success of an organization and the personal advancement of its employees. A productive performance management system serves an integral business function — it provides a two-way avenue of communication between a supervisor and an employee. It helps employees to improve performance and it helps an organization to succeed in a competitive, cost-conscious environment.

Contrary to what some supervisors believe, the annual performance appraisal is not an end in and of itself — it is a means to an end. It is only one part, the third and final part, of an ongoing performance management process that is preceded by performance planning (i.e., setting reasonable performance expectations and standards) and coaching and counseling (i.e., providing constructive feedback, guidance and assistance for the purpose of improving employee performance).

Supervisors and managers are employed to manage the performance (effectiveness and efficiency) of an organization (business, service agency, etc.) and the people (employees, staff, etc.) who make up the human resources of the organization. Unfortunately, much of the research conducted during the 1990's indicates they are not doing a very good job of it. For example:

- 70% say managers do not provide clear goals and directions
- 55% say their managers are poor or average in providing direction
- 70% say performance expectations are not clearly defined
- 70% have never had meaningful performance discussion with their manager
- 65% say the most important information needed concerns ways to improve performance
- 80% say their supervisor does not follow up on the review
- 71% of professionals believe their company's system for evaluating performance is not fair
- 52% say poor performance is tolerated too long
- 80% do not see a relationship between good work and rewards
- 98% believe pay should reflect performance and only 48% believe their company's pay system does
- 70% want more recognition of their efforts
- 70% of professionals believe their pay is not tied to performance

These statistics suggest that supervisors need to more effectively use the entire performance management process. They need to do more than fill out an annual performance appraisal form every year and stuff it into an employee's personnel folder to collect dust. What was once the be-all and end-all of employee evaluation should now be a punctuation point at the end and beginning of an ongoing process. This guide has been written to help supervisors become effective "performance managers."

II. OBJECTIVES

The information contained in this "Supervisor's Guide" should enable a supervisor to:

- Understand the performance management and appraisal process
- Understand and successfully implement the Division of Personnel's Employee Performance Appraisal (EPA) System
- Develop, communicate and achieve agreement on performance expectations and standards
- Properly use coaching and counseling techniques to provide feedback and improve employee performance
- Properly complete DOP Forms EPA-1, EPA-2, and EPA-3 and the Employee Performance Appraisal Worksheet
- Successfully develop a performance plan, provide effective coaching and counseling, and conduct an interim or mid-point review and annual or final performance appraisal
- Explain the organization and operation of the Division of Personnel's Employee Performance Appraisal System to other supervisors, subordinates and other individuals, as needed

III. THE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND APPRAISAL PROCESS

To be effective at evaluating an employee's performance, it is necessary for a supervisor to understand the entire performance management and appraisal process. In other words, supervisors need to see the "Big Picture" in order to recognize how the various parts of the system fit together. This can be achieved by looking at all of the system's parts, individually, and then studying how the various parts relate to one another. One of the best methods to accomplish this is to look at each of the parts of the process sequentially. Those parts include:

- Performance Planning
- Coaching and Counseling
- Interim or Mid-Point Review
- Annual or Final Performance Appraisal

These three parts of the performance management and appraisal puzzle are reduced to the following oversimplifications:

- First, tell employees what is expected of them and give them a chance to accomplish it
- Second, tell them from time-to-time how they are doing, especially when they are not performing as expected and offer suggestions for improvement
- Third, tell them how they have done overall throughout the performance rating period and use that information in future performance planning

Unfortunately, most things are easier said than done. However, this does not mean the performance appraisal process cannot be mastered. It can — mainly through study and practice. We will begin by studying what each part of the process entails, that is, what supervisors have to do, when they have to do it, and what forms they need to complete to document the action they took.

Performance Planning

The most important part of the performance management process is the establishment of realistic, challenging, yet attainable, performance expectations and standards. Employees with easily accomplished expectations and standards may have their knowledge, skills and abilities overstated, while employees with very difficult or unattainable expectations and standards may have their knowledge, skills and abilities understated. The first group may appear better than they actually are and the second group may appear worse. Thus, supervisors must be able to develop and communicate expectations and standards to employees in a manner that can clearly be understood and accepted by the employee. It is difficult, if not impossible, for employees to accept or “buy into” expectations and standards they do not understand and/or do not agree with. With specific expectations and standards, employees can understand clearly what performance is required of them — what they are being paid to do or achieve. As a result, work activities can be precisely targeted and planned and performance is likely to improve. Without specific expectations and standards, work activities are spread over too wide a range (through trial and error) and, due to a lack of focus, performance will likely diminish.

There are five important characteristics that all performance expectations should possess. All performance characteristics should pass the SMART Test. This means they should be:

- **Specific**
- **Measurable**
- **Achievable**
- **Relevant**
- **Timely**

Coaching and Counseling

A performance plan by itself will not improve performance, it is only the first step in an ongoing process. Supervisors must monitor employee progress and conduct periodic reviews to discuss successes and areas needing improvement. The feedback supervisors provide in this part of the process should be specific. The supervisor should solicit comments and ensure that criticism is constructive. Avoid emphasizing the negative and always find and acknowledge some employee successes.

Poor performance on the part of an employee can usually be traced to one of the following reasons:

- The employee does not know what is expected
- The employee does not know how he or she is performing
- The employee cannot do the job because he or she does not know how
- The employee lacks organizational support and help from the supervisor
- The supervisor and the employee have developed a poor working relationship

Research shows that employees' feelings about their employer's performance management system are closely related to their satisfaction and trust in their immediate supervisor and the feedback they are given. Specifically, when compared to those not satisfied with their supervisors, employees who are satisfied with their supervisors are over 1½ times more likely to say they are satisfied with the performance management system. If supervisors cannot be trusted to give credible feedback aimed at improving an employee's weaknesses, the performance management system will similarly lack credibility and fail to motivate employees to improve.

Coaching and counseling is an attempt to overcome performance weaknesses and build on performance strengths. Coaching and counseling is actually a set of relationships between a supervisor and an employee, rather than a series of skills to be taught. It can take many forms, including analyzing performance problems, identifying performance that can be improved, correcting improper or dangerous practices, discussing work with an employee to discover his or her point of view, and providing assistance and encouragement to the employee.

Generally, coaching and counseling:

- Involves face-to-face guidance and instruction
- Is meant to improve job effectiveness and efficiency
- Is based on the supervisor's knowledge or developmental opportunities that he or she can provide
- Ensures close attention to individual employee needs
- Occurs on an on-going basis rather than on infrequent occasions

Remember, a good coach and counselor:

- Has a sincere interest in helping the employee to improve
- Has a thorough knowledge of the position requirements and objectives
- Arranges for positive and progressive work to be reviewed and rewarded by superiors
- Operates from the sidelines (i.e., does not try to “play” and “coach” at the same time)
- Recognizes individual differences

The Annual Performance Appraisal

If a supervisor has been diligent in pursuing a year-round performance management system, the annual appraisal will almost write itself. The annual appraisal or review should be another meeting between the supervisor and employee to review and update past goals and tasks, and to develop future performance expectations and standards.

No supervisor or manager can afford to take employee appraisals lightly. Employees who are suspended, demoted or dismissed are increasingly turning to the courts and regulatory agencies for relief from what they see as arbitrary appraisal actions by the employers. In far too many cases, the employees are able to produce records of consistently favorable appraisals, with no real warning of trouble to come. When the situations occur, their employers' actions are viewed with suspicion.

The following are tips for conducting the Annual Performance Appraisal interview:

- Decide in advance what you want to achieve: evaluation, criticism, training, coaching, morale-building, greater output. Do not let one goal interfere with another.
- Do not wait until the review to let your staff know what you expect from them. Let the employee know early on exactly what the job requires, what specific goals, standards and deadlines you expect him or her to meet, and how you plan to evaluate and reward performance. It is a daily process.
- Keep a written log or journal throughout the year in which you enter detailed accounts of individual performance — good or bad — on typical tasks during “critical incidents” for use at review time. Supervisory notes should be maintained by the supervisor in an administrative file and **not** in the agency personnel file.
- The review should be a two-way street. Let the employee talk about their own performance and problems. Determine whether they have a realistic assessment of their own abilities.

- Be fair, but do not be afraid to give honest criticism when necessary. Most employees do not want a meaningless pat on the back. They want to know where they stand and how they can improve. Encourage the employee to talk. Stop and listen to what the employee is saying. Ask open-ended questions such as, “What do you think we can do to improve the situation?” Use a command such as “Go on,” or “Tell me more.” Restate the employee’s last point as a question, such as “You don’t think you can get the job done?”
- Listen. Numerous surveys of employee attitudes reveal the feeling that “management does not care what we think.” The review is your chance to get valuable feedback from your own subordinates about their jobs or agency policy.
- Discuss your written appraisal with the employee and compare yours to theirs. Determine whether he or she believes your rating is fair. The employee does not have to agree with you 100%, but if he or she strongly disagrees, they are likely to be less motivated to improve performance. It is worth exploring the reasons for any disagreement.
- Be direct and specific. Speak in terms of objective work data. Use examples such as absences, tardiness, quality records, inspection reports, waste, orders processed, productivity records, material used or consumed, timeliness of tasks or projects, control or reduction of costs, number of errors, costs compared to budgets, customer comments, order processing time and accuracy, accident reports, etc.
- Keep the review focused on the employee’s performance. Show that you care about his or her career. Otherwise, the employee will get the message that the review, and perhaps his or her performance, does not matter.
- Base your judgements on observable behavior, not general opinions or impressions. Even when rating personality or character traits, use specific examples of such traits in actual practice on the job.
- Do not tiptoe around an issue. Make sure the employee leaves knowing specifically what he or she is doing right and/or wrong. Give specific examples to ensure the employee understands and reach an agreement before he or she leaves on how performance will be improved and the time frame for achievement. Develop an action plan showing steps and expected results.
- Do not get personal. Refrain from using statements such as, “You are too slow in producing those reports.” Instead, try to compare the employee’s performance to a standard (e.g., “These reports should normally be done within ten days”). Similarly, do not compare the employee’s performance to that of other employees (e.g., “He is quicker than you are”).

- Critique the behavior, not the employee. Keep the discussion on a professional level, not personal. Avoid confrontation.
- Make sure you also give encouragement, when critiquing an employee's performance. Be constructive in your criticism. Do not simply tell an employee that he or she is "not aggressive enough." Reinforce good habits with praise and point out how the employee can improve, with specific examples.

IV. DIVISION OF PERSONNEL'S EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL SYSTEM:

A Three Step Process

The Division of Personnel's Employee Performance Appraisal Policy lists the following Steps I, II, and III, which match exactly the three parts of the performance management and appraisal process:

Step I: The Initial (Performance) Planning Session

Initial Planning Session - During the first 30 days of each performance rating period, supervisors/raters are required to meet individually with each subordinate employee to identify, define, and describe performance expectations (e.g., responsibilities, duties, and standards). The purpose of this meeting is to ensure that the employee understands and is committed to established performance expectations for his or her job.

NOTE: It is best to conduct the performance planning session for the upcoming appraisal period at a later date, rather than when the EPA-3 is completed. This will allow time for the results of the just-ended period to be more thoroughly considered and evaluated.

Step II: The Mid-Point Review

Mid-Point Review - Near the middle of the performance period (toward the end of the first six months of performance), supervisors/raters are required to meet individually with each subordinate employee to conduct a formal, midpoint review of the employee's performance. During this meeting, the supervisor/rater must provide feedback to the employee concerning the employee's strengths, weaknesses (if any), and performance during the primary performance period. If appropriate, the supervisor/rater may develop a performance improvement plan which describes the action(s) the employee must take to improve his or her performance to the "meets expectations" level.

Step III: The Final Review Session

Final Review Session - Within 30 days following the end of the performance rating period, supervisors are required to meet individually with each of their subordinate employees to review and rate the performance of each employee during the entire performance rating period. **Prior to the final review session, the completed but unsigned Employee Appraisal Form(s) shall be sent to the reviewing manager for review and approval** (emphasis added). After approval, the reviewing manager shall return the unsigned Employee Appraisal Form(s) to the supervisor/rater for use in the final review session. The purpose of the final review session is to provide employees with a formal rating of their overall job performance throughout the entire rating period and to generate information to be used as the basis for future performance planning.

SPECIAL NOTE: Supervisor's comments on Form EPA-3 regarding particular interim items should be limited to ratings of "Needs Improvement" and "Exceeds Expectations" and should identify why that rating was given. Coaching comments and other general comments related to items rated as "Meets Expectations" should be limited to "Summary Comments" on page 7.

The fact that all three steps have been taken does not mean the supervisor's work is finished. There are still tasks to be done to finalize the annual appraisal cycle so that another appraisal cycle can begin. The supervisor must complete the appraisal and meet record-keeping requirements before planning for the future.

V. UNDERSTANDING THE FORMS: DOP Forms EPA-1, EPA-2 and EPA-3

The employee performance appraisal system requires records to be kept and forms to be filled out. In the DOP EPA System, there are three forms to be completed: EPA-1, EPA-2, and EPA-3 (EPA-3 contains a worksheet).

The Division of Personnel's Employee Performance Appraisal Policy states the following regarding these three steps and the filing of complete and signed forms:

DOP Form EPA-1 shall be used for the Initial Planning Session; whenever coaching is indicated; or when expectations must be changed or modified.

DOP Form EPA-2 shall be used for the Interim or Mid-Point Review; for the probationary employee; or for special situations involving performance that fails to meet expectations.

DOP Form EPA-3 shall be used for the final review of the entire performance period and shall result in an overall rating. Forms EPA-1 and EPA-2 may be attached to and made a part of Form EPA-3.

Filing Completed and Signed Forms - When the appropriate form has been completed and all signatures and dates have been affixed, but no later than ten days following the end of the 30 days provided for final review, the rating supervisor: (1) retains a copy together with any supporting documents used in the evaluation process; (2) provides a copy of the form to the employee; and (3) forwards the original form through appropriate agency channels to the agency head. The agency head, or his or her designee, shall maintain the form in the employee's official agency personnel file.

NOTE: Depending on the circumstances, Form EPA-2 should also be used at other times. For example, Form EPA-2 should be completed prior to an employee's completion of a probationary period.

NOTE: Form EPA-3 should be used when a supervisor stops supervising an employee.

VI. UNDERSTANDING THE NEED FOR EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION

Knowing the performance management process (and the steps to be taken) and recognizing what forms to complete is not all that supervisors need to know. It is just as important, if not more so, that supervisors understand the importance of securing employee involvement and participation in all aspects of the performance management process.

The most important aspect of the performance management and appraisal process is the regular, ongoing communication between supervisors and employees concerning what the employees are expected to do and how well they are actually doing it. That is why the involvement and participation of employees is critically important to the success of the entire process. Any supervisor who neglects this jeopardizes the process, since supervisor-employee dialogue is the key.

Research and personal experience indicate that when employees meaningfully participate in the performance management process, both the quality and quantity of performance information increases, leading to a more accurate and valid appraisal. Also, those who participate are more likely to assume "joint ownership" of the process, which creates an atmosphere of cooperation and encourages the development of an open and honest coaching or counseling relationship and the acceptance of performance ratings, even adverse ones. A discussion of the importance of employee participation in all three parts, or steps, in the performance management process (i.e., performance planning, coaching and counseling, and performance appraisal) follows.

Performance Planning Participation

The creation of a performance plan should not be a “supervisor only” activity. Employees should be encouraged to actively participate in defining performance expectations and standards. Employee involvement can improve the reliability, validity, fairness, and usefulness of those performance expectations and standards because employees have direct, first-hand experience with all of the forces that impact their jobs. This makes their participation essential for developing realistic expectations and standards. After all, the individual who should best know a job is the one who is doing the job. If that is not true, something is very wrong.

The first step in performance planning is for the supervisor and the employee to review the employee’s job duties and responsibilities and determine the key expectations and standards (e.g., results, goals, objectives, etc.) to be reached during the upcoming performance period (usually 12 months).

The supervisor and the employee should then confer and negotiate what they agree to be a realistic, challenging and achievable set of expectations and standards. These expectations and standards will be used by the supervisor to monitor the employee’s performance and to decide when and what coaching and counseling, if any, is needed by the employee to assess and guide his or her own performance. Self-assessment and self-direction are the desired result of participatory performance planning.

Coaching and Counseling Participation

An effective appraisal process requires employee feedback. Appraisal systems that provide formal feedback once a year are more likely to be deficient. In order for an appraisal system to be maximally effective, there must be formal and frequent informal performance feedback.

Supervisors, though they may not be conscious of it, review and evaluate the performance of their employees, informally, almost daily. While such feedback may be nothing more than the comment, “Good job,” it is feedback just the same and lets employees know they are meeting expectations.

Feedback is the “raw material” of employee participation. Feedback is essential in gaining the maximum benefits from goal setting. Without feedback, employees are unable to make adjustments in job performance nor do they receive positive reinforcement for effective job behavior. Effective performance feedback is timely, specific, behavioral in nature, and presented by a credible source. It is effective in changing employee work behavior and enhances employee job satisfaction and performance. In the present Employee Performance Appraisal System, supervisors must formally provide employees with feedback during the mid-point or interim progress review; however, feedback should also be given when performance fails to meet expectations and, often overlooked, when performance exceeds expectations.

Few supervisors need to be told how to praise an employee's good work; however, successful coaching and counseling is dependent on a supervisor being able to deliver effective feedback and constructive criticism. This is something that takes careful planning, interpersonal skills and practice. Well-given constructive criticism and poorly-given criticism tend to have the following characteristics:

Poorly-Delivered Criticism:

- *Vague*: Offers no specifics, but makes a blanket condemnation
- *Threatening and Pessimistic*: Attributes the problem to personality or some other unchangeable trait and makes the employee feel attacked. It also offers no hope for change or suggestion for doing better
- *Untimely*: Not given until weeks or even months after the problem was first identified

Example: "That was a lousy job (*Vague*) you did last month (*Untimely*) and you're too stupid to know what you did wrong (*Pessimistic*)! Next time, you're through (*Threatening*)."

Well-Given Criticism:

- *Specific*: The supervisor says exactly what the employee is doing wrong
- *Supportive and Optimistic*: Gives the sense that criticism is meant to help the employee perform better and suggests a solution or offers to help find a method of improvement
- *Timely*: Gives the message soon after the problem occurs

Example: "There were several calculation errors in the activity report (*Specific*) you submitted this morning (*Timely*). This report is used to determine our matching funds, so it is very important that it is accurate. Let's review the report this afternoon to make sure you are clear on which numbers go into the calculations (*Supportive*). Then, when you prepare the report the next time, I think you will get a better result (*Optimistic*)."

The key to giving positive, constructive criticism (e.g., competent guidance and direction) involves being specific, supportive, positive, and timely. Not clearly relating to an employee how he or she is faltering, not suggesting ways to improve, and not providing prompt feedback soon after a problem is identified are all recipes for disaster.

Annual Performance Appraisal Participation

The following four guidelines should improve any supervisor's ability to conduct a fair and honest performance appraisal:

- (1) Put the employee first.

When an employee feels forced to defend his or her self-esteem, messages do not get through. Create a safe atmosphere, be empathetic, and focus on the positive. How a manager says what he or she says is actually more important than what is said. The wrong tone can distort the content of the message.

Positive Remark: "I asked Joan for feedback regarding your presentation skills. She said you were prepared and professional, but your style was a bit formal for that particular audience. Let's meet so we can work on this."

Negative Remark: "I thought you had better presentation skills. Joan's feedback was that there was something about you that makes clients feel uncomfortable."

- (2) Aim for self-evaluation.

If the Performance Management Process is a cooperative and participatory process, then the appraisal of an employee's performance should be one also. This means that employees should be given the chance to take a long, hard and objective look at their own performance to identify areas where they perform well and areas in need of improvement.

Studies indicate that self-appraisal increases employee preparation and readiness for the appraisal interview, enhances overall satisfaction, increases perceived appraisal fairness, and reduces defensive behavior when used for developmental purposes. Employees can self-evaluate by completing their own appraisals and presenting drafts for discussion with the supervisor, or the employee can review a draft of the supervisor's appraisal. Supervisory and employee ratings frequently do not agree. However, in a participatory system, the goal is not absolute agreement, but rather a process directed towards achieving a consensus over time. The self-appraisal process is improved significantly if clear performance standards are used, the employees are experienced, and levels of trust are high.

When managers create ongoing dialogue year-round, employees already know where their performance lapses are and almost always raise them themselves. That means no surprises and no feelings that the manager is being overly critical and reduces the likelihood of a defensive behavioral response.

Positive Remark: (Immediately after the event.) “This was the first time you represented the department at the Executive Committee meeting. I noticed that you weren’t very comfortable with the more technical aspects. Tell me why.”

Negative Remark: (Six months later and in response to a question.) “The reason you haven’t been asked to represent the department again is that you lack the technical expertise to win credibility.”

- (3) Tolerate disagreement, but be specific.

Creating a safe atmosphere does not mean avoiding disagreement; however, do not let it get personal. That causes people either to shut down or push back. Emphasize specific behaviors and their consequences. The point of performance-oriented dialogue is to reset direction, not to point out inadequacies.

Positive Remark: “You used a bit of jargon in your presentation. You said that we provide “hosted collaboration software to connect businesses requiring project-based resources.” John Smith didn’t appear to understand. Did you notice how he behaved for the rest of your presentation?”

Negative Remark: “You know you really turned everybody off when you started to use jargon in that presentation.”

- (4) Set objectives and make accountability explicit.

Reviews should be about the future, not the past. Determine what is working and what is not and apply the lessons learned. Employees should leave knowing how behaviors need to be adjusted and what they should do in the future. Supervisor’s dialogue should also set specific objectives and follow-up dates for monitoring progress.

Positive Remark: “So, we have agreed that you will spend more time developing the graphics for the next presentation to give them the same impact you create with your text slides. Let’s meet two days before your next presentation so we can discuss them.”

Negative Remark: (Immediately before the presentation.) “I hope your graphics are better this time than the last time.”

VII. THE FINAL WORD

Regardless of how imperfect, performance management and appraisal will continue to be one of a supervisor's foremost duties. While supervisors may feel that they are not doing as well as they could, it does not mean the situation is hopeless. Through open and honest communication, employee involvement and participation, and mutual trust and cooperation, a performance management and appraisal system can improve employee performance and the achievement of organizational goals. One fact is certain, the success of the system depends on the supervisor's ability to understand and implement all three parts of the performance management process.

A factor most critical to employees' satisfaction with the performance management system is having confidence that their performance appraisals are fair. If they perceive that the performance appraisal is unfair (i.e., their individual performance appraisal understates their level of performance or within the work group everyone has close to the same rating), the credibility of the entire system is called into question. Since the first employee assessment system was developed, up until today, performance appraisal systems have been "widely criticized for failing to differentiate between employees since virtually everyone receives a 'satisfactory' rating." Supervisors should strive to distinguish their better performers from those who may not be and relate to them that their good work is appreciated. If supervisors fail to do this, the better performers will have no reason, aside from personal satisfaction, for continuing to perform at a high level, and the mediocre employees will have no reason to improve their performance.

QUICK REFERENCE

When Should a Supervisor Use Division of Personnel Employee Performance Appraisal (EPA) System Forms

Form EPA-1

Supervisor should develop an EPA-1 when:

- A performance appraisal period begins
- A vacant position is filled
- A new position is created
- Work processes and procedures change
- Duties and responsibilities change
- Performance standards and expectations change
- A position is reclassified
- A position is reallocated
- Technology changes
- Staffing levels increase or decrease
- Workloads increase or decrease
- An employee's products or services fail to contribute to the accomplishment of the organization's mission

Form EPA-2

Supervisor should develop an EPA-2 when:

- Half of the performance appraisal period has passed
- All of the work is not being done
- Performance standards and expectations are not being met
- An employee needs to acquire or improve his or her knowledge, skills, and abilities

Form EPA-3

Supervisor should develop an EPA-3 when:

- The performance appraisal period ends
- An employee leaves employment
- The supervisor departs