



U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board

SUBJECT: General Schedule (GS) Performance Appraisal System

CONTENTS

1.	Purpose.....	2
2.	Effective Date	2
3.	Scope.....	2
4.	References	2
5.	Definitions.....	2
6.	Responsibilities.....	4
7.	Performance Plans	5
8.	Progress Reviews	7
9.	Performance Appraisals	8
10.	Additional Considerations	10
11.	Reconsideration.....	10
12.	Relationship with Personnel Actions	11
13.	Performance Improvement Plans (PIP)	12
14.	Details, Transfers and Other Circumstances.....	13
15.	Records	14

1. **PURPOSE.** This Order establishes policy and procedures for the appraisal of General Schedule (GS) employees of the Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board (CSB). This Order is intended as a supplement to performance-related statutes, regulations, and Office of Personnel Management (OPM) guidance, linking employee performance to the CSB's mission and organizational goals, strategic and action plans.
2. **EFFECTIVE DATE.** This Board Order is effective upon passage by the Board.
3. **SCOPE.** This Order applies to all general schedule (GS) employees in the competitive and excepted service. It does not apply to Presidential appointees, members of the Senior Executive Service, intermittent employees, contractors, and temporary employees whose appointments are not expected to exceed 120 days and are subject to other appraisal requirements.
4. **REFERENCES.**
 - a. Performance Appraisal — [5 U.S.C. § 4302](#) and [5 C.F.R. part 430](#)
 - b. Performance-Based Reduction in Grade and Removal Actions — [5 U.S.C. § 4302\(c\)\(6\)](#) and [5 C.F.R. part 432](#)
 - c. [OPM Performance Management Toolkit](#)
 - d. [CSB Collective Bargaining Agreement](#) (internal document)
5. **DEFINITIONS.**
 - a. **Appraisal** – The process under which performance is reviewed and evaluated.
 - b. **Appraisal Period** – The established period of time for which performance will be reviewed, and a rating of record will be prepared. The appraisal period for GS CSB employees extends from October 1 through September 30.
 - c. **Days** – All references to days in this Board Order are to calendar days, unless otherwise specified.
 - d. **Critical Element** – A work assignment or responsibility that is so important that poor performance in that area would cause the GS employee's overall performance to be rated as unacceptable. This type of element is evaluated solely based on the individual GS employee's performance.

- e. **Minimum Appraisal Period** – The shortest period in which a GS employee must serve under established standards to receive a rating. GS employees who complete at least 90 days under the same performance plan during the appraisal period will be given a summary rating for that period.
- f. **Performance** – The accomplishment of work assignments or responsibilities.
- g. **Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)** – A plan provided to each GS employee whose performance is determined to be unacceptable in one or more critical elements. Also referred to as a Notice of Opportunity to Demonstrate Acceptable Performance (NODAP)¹.
- h. **Performance Plan** – All written, or otherwise recorded, performance elements that set forth expected performance. A plan must include all critical elements and their performance standards. Each GS employee must have a written, current performance plan.
- i. **Performance Rating** – The written appraisal of performance compared to the performance standard for each critical element on which there has been an opportunity to perform for the minimum period. The rating may include a summary rating.
- j. **Performance Standard** – The management-approved expression of the performance thresholds, requirements, or expectations that must be met to be appraised at a particular level of performance. A performance standard may include, but is not limited to quality, quantity, timeliness, and manner of performance.
- k. **Progress Review** – Documented communication during the appraisal period with the GS employee about their performance compared to the performance standards for critical elements. Currently, progress reviews are held at least once during the appraisal period but may be required to be more frequent².
- l. **Quality Step Increase (QSI)** – An additional within-grade increase (WGI) used to recognize and reward GS employees at any grade level who display outstanding performance.

¹ This is a Department of the Interior (DOI) term. The term is included in this Board Order, as the CSB utilizes the services of the Interior Business Center (IBC) for various Human Resources matters. Other agencies use other terms for the same purpose.

² The number of progress reviews and their due dates will be communicated regularly to all staff by the Office of Human Resources.

- m. **Rating Official** – The official, usually the immediate supervisor, who initially appraises the GS employee's performance and recommends a rating of record.
- n. **Rating of Record** – The performance rating prepared at the end of an appraisal period for performance of CSB-assigned duties over the entire period and the assignment of a summary level.
- o. **Reviewing Official** – The official, usually the rating official's immediate supervisor, who reviews and concurs with or changes the recommended rating before it is finalized. In the case of any GS employee who reports directly to the Chairperson, the Chairperson will be the rating official and reviewing official, although the Chairperson may designate another Board Member or CSB staff to perform the function of the reviewing official. GS employees who report directly to the Chairperson shall be notified of the assigned reviewing official upon receipt of their performance plans. Alternatively, the Chairperson may designate another Board Member or CSB staff to review and recommend to the Chairperson a rating of record, which the Chairperson will consider before assigning the final rating. The Chairperson may choose to accept the rating or give the GS employee a different final rating at the Chairperson's discretion.
- p. **Summary Rating** – The final performance level assigned after evaluating all critical elements in a GS employee's performance plan.
- q. **Within-Grade Increase (WGI)** – Periodic increases in a GS employee's rate of basic pay from one step of the grade of the GS employee's position to the next higher step of that grade. Each GS grade has up to ten steps. A WGI is also referred to as a step increase. The increases occur over a specific period of time if the GS employee maintains an acceptable level of performance.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES.

- a. The **Office of Human Resources (OHR)**: provides technical support and guidance to rating officials, reviewing officers, and other CSB staff in the administration of the performance appraisal system and other specific duties as detailed in this Board Order in consultation with the Chairperson and General Counsel, as necessary. This includes ensuring that performance appraisal records are properly maintained in employee [electronic Official Personnel Folders \(eOPF\)](#).³ Additionally, OHR will communicate to employees, due dates for each part of the performance appraisal process (e.g.,

³ The eOPF is an OPM electronic system that stores, manages, and distributes official personnel documents for federal employees. It contains all official records required to document a federal career.

performance plans, progress reviews, employee self-assessments/accomplishments/input, performance appraisals, and performance awards).

- b. **Supervisors**⁴ are responsible for serving as rating officials for employees under their direct supervision; establishing meaningful performance plans for their subordinates that are clear, concise, and related to organizational goals; providing progress reviews; gathering performance input from employees; evaluating employees fairly and accurately; providing performance ratings; recommending performance awards, and taking other actions related to appraising performance in accordance with performance appraisal statutes, regulations, OPM guidance and this Board Order. Supervisors will consult with OHR regarding any questions or when addressing special, unique, or unusual situations.
- c. **Second-level supervisors**⁵ are responsible for serving as reviewing officials and reviewing performance plans and appraisals in accordance with performance appraisal system statutes, regulations, OPM guidance and this Board Order.
- d. **GS Employees** are responsible for participating in the establishment of performance plans and in other aspects of the performance appraisal process, as appropriate, and for accepting responsibility for performing all critical elements of their performance plans.

7. PERFORMANCE PLANS.

- a. Each GS employee must have a written, current performance plan. The performance plan is documented in [USA Performance](#)⁶ which facilitates routing of the performance plan from the rating official to the reviewing official and to the employee. Performance plans consist of critical elements and performance standards. Performance plans identify performance expectations and goals for groups and individuals to channel their efforts toward achieving organizational objectives.
- b. The rating official will establish the GS employee's written performance plan before the beginning of the performance appraisal period but in any event, this should be no later than 30 days after the start of the appraisal period (i.e., by October 31), appointment to a new position, or when a performance plan is changed.

⁴ When someone other than the employee's immediate supervisor is assigned to be a rating official, this Board Order and all statutes, regulations, and OPM guidance apply regarding the rating official's responsibilities

⁵ When someone other than the employee's second-level supervisor is assigned to be a reviewing official, this Board Order and all statutes, regulations, and OPM guidance apply regarding the reviewing official's responsibilities.

⁶ USA Performance is the OPM data system used by the CSB to govern the performance appraisal system, its processes, and records.

- c. The performance plan will be developed to measure performance requirements based on work assignments and responsibilities of each GS employee's position description. The plan will align with goals that are part of or derived from the CSB's Strategic Plan, Action Plan, or other guidance that may be provided by the Chairperson for the forthcoming year.
- d. Performance plans will include at least three critical elements for the appraisal period and will describe the performance standard for the following three rating levels: Outstanding, Exceeds Fully Successful, and Fully Successful.
- e. GS employees are encouraged to participate in the development and revision of performance plans.
- f. Rating officials will discuss the critical elements and performance standards with the GS employee and assist the GS employee in understanding performance expectations. Agreement on the performance standards is desirable; however, the final determination of elements and standards will be made by the rating official, in consultation, as appropriate, with OHR to assure a consistent approach within the organization.
- g. Performance plans must support organizational goals and objectives and be linked to overall individual GS employee's Office program results.⁷
- h. Performance standards must be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely (SMART). They should be clearly articulated to demonstrate how a GS employee's performance is achievable and how it aligns with and supports organizational and/or strategic goals.
- i. Four rating levels are established for all elements in the CSB's performance appraisal program: Outstanding, Exceeds Fully Successful, Fully Successful, and Unacceptable.
- j. Rating officials, reviewing officials, and GS employees will sign and date the performance plan containing the critical elements and performance standards. The GS employee's signature certifies that they have received a copy of the critical elements and performance standards and that they were discussed with the GS employee. The employee's signature serves only to acknowledge receipt of their performance plan and does not indicate agreement or disagreement with the performance plan. If the employee declines to sign the performance plan, they will be issued a memorandum (with the

⁷ For example, a GS employee assigned to the Office of Recommendation would have goals and objectives from the Recommendations Program.

guidance of OHR), along with a copy of the performance plan attached to the memorandum, stating that the performance plan was provided and the GS employee declined to sign it.

- k. Critical elements and performance standards may be modified during the appraisal period if necessary. The performance plan may not, however, be changed less than 90 days before the GS employee is rated. The GS employee must have at least 90 days under the same performance plan to receive a rating on those critical elements and performance standards.

8. PROGRESS REVIEWS.

- a. Performance on each critical element shall be appraised against its performance standard(s).
- b. The appraisal process is an ongoing effort and supervisors are to provide feedback, formally and informally, to GS employees on a continuing basis.
- c. GS employees must receive at least one progress review at the mid-period of the appraisal period. This frequency may increase at the discretion of OPM. For most employees, the mid-period progress review will happen midway through the appraisal period. The formal progress review(s) is documented in [USA Performance](#). At a minimum, rating officials will document a summary of the GS employees' overall performance in the progress review section of [USA Performance](#). Rating officials and GS employees will sign and date the progress reviews. The GS employee's signature serves only to acknowledge receipt of their progress review. If the employee declines to sign the progress review, they will be issued a memorandum (with the guidance of OHR), along with a copy of the progress review feedback attached to the memorandum, stating that the progress review was provided and the GS employee declined to sign it
- d. During the progress review, GS employees will be given meaningful feedback to provide them with a basis for understanding areas for improvement and progress towards achieving the performance standards set forth in their performance plans.
- e. Rating officials shall notify and provide assistance or feedback to GS employees at any time that performance falls below the Fully Successful level. This Board Order contains instructions herein for situations in which performance falls below the Fully Successful level. Rating officials cannot take formal adverse action (e.g., reduction-in-grade and pay or removal) against a GS employee based on unacceptable performance before the GS employee has been notified by the rating official, in writing, of the deficiencies and providing an opportunity period to demonstrate performance improvement.

9. PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS.

- a. The performance appraisal is documented in [USA Performance](#), which facilitates routing of the performance appraisal from the rating official to the reviewing official and to the GS employee.
- b. At the end of the appraisal period, the rating official will review the critical elements and performance standards, any available documentation or records relevant to the GS employee's performance, and information from the progress review(s). Rating officials should seek input from others with knowledge of the GS employee's work, as well as the GS employee being rated, before finalizing the GS employee's performance appraisal.
- c. When preparing performance ratings, the rating official may give appropriate consideration to any performance appraisals received by the GS employee during the appraisal period, such as those from a detail or a previous position⁸. Performance appraisals from other positions held during the same appraisal period can only be considered in preparing a summary rating for that period. A rating of record can only be based on the evaluation of job performance during the period covered by the rating. A rating of record from a previous performance appraisal period cannot be carried over to a subsequent performance appraisal period.
- d. After the conclusion of the appraisal period, GS employees should submit to their rating official a self-assessment, accomplishments, or other information related to their performance during the appraisal period. Such information should relate to the established performance plan. The rating official will consider this information, if submitted, as well as other information relevant to the GS employee's performance that is available and will assign one performance rating levels for each critical element. Performance rating levels are the categories used to assess and describe how effectively a GS employee meets job performance expectations during an appraisal period. They are standardized tiers that indicate the quality, effectiveness, and impact of a GS employee's work in relation to their performance plan, as shown below:
 - Outstanding
 - Exceeds Fully Successful
 - Fully Successful
 - Unacceptable

⁸ This primarily applies to GS employees on a detail or who have been reassigned during the appraisal period.

- e. End-of-year close-out performance meetings will include a detailed discussion with the GS employee regarding each critical element and the assigned performance rating level with specific examples from the GS employee's work.
- f. A description of how the GS employee achieved the performance rating level must be provided.
- g. The rating official will assign a summary rating, which will be computed as follows:
 - (1) Outstanding: majority of critical elements rated as Outstanding; no critical element rated less than Exceeds Fully Successful.
 - (2) Exceeds Fully Successful: majority of the critical elements rated as Exceeds Fully Successful; no critical element rated less than Fully Successful.
 - (3) Fully Successful: majority of critical elements rated as Fully Successful; no critical element rated as Unacceptable.
 - (4) Unacceptable: one or more critical elements rated as Unacceptable.
- h. An Unacceptable summary rating will be assigned only if one or more critical elements are rated Unacceptable.
- i. The rating official will meet and discuss the appraisal with the GS employee. A copy of each GS employee's performance appraisal will be available to them through [USA Performance](#) and retained in their [eOPF](#).
- j. The reviewed and signed performance appraisal becomes final upon issuance to the GS employee. The GS employee will sign the form, indicating receipt of the appraisal. The GS employee's signature does not indicate agreement with the performance appraisal and does not impact their right to request reconsideration of the performance appraisal in accordance with this Board Order. If the GS employee declines to sign the appraisal, they will be issued a memorandum (with the guidance of OHR) with a copy of the completed appraisal attached to the memorandum stating that the performance appraisal was provided and that the GS employee declined to sign it.
- k. Each GS employee should receive a written or otherwise recorded rating of record no later than 60 days following the end of the appraisal period.
- l. After completing the performance appraisal, the rating official will forward it to the reviewing official, who will either concur with and sign the performance appraisal or revise and sign it.

10. ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS.

- a. The rating official may not hold a GS employee accountable for work that is not performed because of an absence for which the GS employee is on any type of approved leave.
- b. In evaluating GS employees, rating officials shall consider circumstances beyond a GS employee's control that affect the GS employee's performance, including any such circumstances identified by the GS employee. Rating officials have the discretion to grant a rating that the GS employee would have received in the absence of those circumstances.
- c. OHR should be consulted regarding any special or unusual situations.

11. RECONSIDERATION.

- a. If a GS employee is dissatisfied with any part of the performance appraisal, they may request reconsideration in writing. This request may be in the form of a memorandum or via e-mail and shall be directed to the reviewing official within 10 business days of the GS employee's receipt of the performance appraisal. The request must be accompanied by a written narrative, no longer than one page in length⁹, explaining the GS employee's dissatisfaction.
- b. The reviewing official shall notify the rating official and OHR when receiving a request for reconsideration.
- c. The reviewing official (with the guidance of OHR) will issue a written decision to the employee within 10 business days of receipt of the request. This decision should address any issues raised by the employee relevant to the performance appraisal, and any other information that the reviewing official feels is necessary to explain the decision.
- d. The reviewing official's decision is final. Performance ratings are not subject to further review.
- e. Changes to a rating of record in response to a GS employee's request for reconsideration shall be made within 60 days of the date the original rating was issued.

⁹ If the request for consideration is via e-mail, the written narrative may be an attachment to that e-mail or may be included in the body of the e-mail.

12. RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER PERSONNEL ACTIONS.

- a. **Career Ladder Promotions.** The performance appraisal is used to determine if GS employees in a career ladder position should be noncompetitively promoted to the next higher grade level. In addition to any other CSB requirements (e.g., work available at the next higher grade level, budget considerations, etc.), a GS employee in a position with a career ladder must receive a summary rating of at least Fully Successful on all critical elements; however, this rating does not guarantee a promotion.
- b. **Performance Award.** This award is a one-time cash payment to recognize a GS employee's performance. It is based on the GS employee's current rating of record, which must be Fully Successful or higher. Performance awards may be awarded under the provisions set forth in Board Order 13, General Schedule (GS) Awards and Incentive Program.
- c. **Probationary Employees.** The performance of a GS employee serving in a probationary or trial period must demonstrate their fitness and qualifications for continued employment. The GS employee's performance plan is a useful tool in making this determination. Rating officials should contact OHR for additional guidance on how to evaluate GS employees serving trial or probationary periods.
- d. **Quality Step Increase (QSI).** A QSI may be granted only if the GS employee has a current rating of record with a summary rating at the Outstanding level. A QSI may be granted at the discretion of the rating official with the Chairperson's concurrence. A QSI is not automatically granted upon receipt of an Outstanding summary rating. QSI's may not be awarded to GS employees who:
 - (1) are in the maximum step of any grade (5 U.S.C. §5335(a)); or
 - (2) have received a QSI in the prior 52-week period (5 U.S.C. § 5336(a); 5 C.F.R. §531.505).
- e. **Training.** Performance appraisals may be used to determine whether training is necessary to improve a GS employee's performance.
- f. **Within-Grade Increases (WGI).** A GS employee may receive a WGI only if their current performance rating is Fully Successful or higher. Regardless of time-in-grade requirements for WGIs, the rating used to support a WGI must be dated within the last year preceding the effective date of the increase. Denial of a WGI is addressed in Article 13, Section 2 of the CSB Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA).

13. PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PLANS (PIP).

- a. If at any time during the appraisal period a GS employee's performance in one or more critical elements is determined to be unacceptable, the rating official must issue a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) to provide the GS employee with an opportunity to improve.
- b. Unacceptable performance means that the performance of any critical element is below the performance rating level described as Fully Successful in the GS employee's established performance plan.
- c. Rating officials identifying employees in need of a PIP should consult OHR.
- d. The purpose of the PIP and improvement period is to provide the GS employee with an opportunity to raise their performance to the Fully Successful level. The performance standards for attaining the Fully Successful level cannot be changed during the improvement period.
- e. A PIP must be in writing and include the following:
 - (1) Identification of the critical element(s) in which the GS employee's performance is Unacceptable. This identification should refer to the critical element specifically as written in the performance plan and should provide specific examples of deficiencies. It should also include dates and summaries of any progress reviews or discussions regarding the GS employee's performance. A copy of the performance plan should be attached to the PIP. If possible, any written examples or documentation of the deficiencies should also be attached.
 - (2) An offer of assistance to the GS employee in improving their performance. Assistance to the GS employee may include, but is not limited to, formal training, on-the-job training, counseling, coaching, and closer supervision.
 - (3) A schedule of formal meetings that the rating official will hold with the GS employee during the improvement period. These meetings will be more often than normal progress reviews and should be sufficient to establish clearly in the record that the GS employee has received assistance.
 - (4) The time in which the GS employee will be expected to improve to the Fully Successful level. This is to be a reasonable amount of time, 30 days to 90 days, and it is understood that the time frame may be extended if additional time is needed per Article 18, Section 7.C.i. of the CSB CBA. Pursuant to OPM's June 17, 2025, memorandum on Performance Management for Federal Employees, the standard PIP duration has been compressed to 30 days.

(5) Notice that failure to improve to the level of Fully Successful could result in the employee's reduction in grade or removal, and that failure to achieve Fully Successful during the PIP period will result in denial of a WGI. Denial of a WGI is addressed in Article 13, Section 2 of the CSB CBA.

- f. If, at the end of the opportunity period, the GS employee's performance continues to be unacceptable in the same critical elements found in the PIP, the rating official must notify the GS employee in writing and may begin action to remove the GS employee or reduce them in grade, in accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 4303 and 5 C.F.R. Part 432.
- g. If the GS employee's performance improves to the level of Fully Successful, they should be so notified in writing, with advice that failure to maintain Fully Successful performance will result in denial of a WGI or other personnel action can be taken. Denial of a WGI is addressed in Article 13, Section 2 of the CSB CBA.
- h. If the GS employee's performance again falls to the Unacceptable level at any time within one year, they can be subject to adverse action, up to and including removal, without completing another PIP or opportunity period. If the GS employee's performance does not again fall below the Fully Successful level until more than one year has passed since the beginning of the previous PIP and opportunity period, they must be given a new PIP and opportunity period before adverse action can be taken.
- i. Rating officials must consult with OHR and/or the Office of the General Counsel during the process of issuing and monitoring GS employees on a PIP.

14. DETAILS, TRANSFERS AND OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES.

- a. **Employee change in positions.** When a GS employee moves out of their position, they will receive a summary rating if they have served in a position under a signed performance plan for at least 90 days.
- b. **Rating official change in positions.** Rating officials moving out of their position must prepare documentation regarding the GS employees' performance and provide it to the new rating official before leaving their position. This documentation shall be considered when the new rating official renders the affected employees' overall summary rating.
- c. **Plans for the new position.** When a GS employee changes positions during the appraisal period or is reassigned or promoted to a new position, the new rating official shall establish critical elements and performance standards within 30 days of the position change or placement of the GS employee in the new position, or as soon as possible.

- d. **Details and Temporary Promotions.** GS employees on details or temporarily promoted for 90 days or more during the appraisal period shall have a performance plan and be rated on their performance while on detail or in a temporary position. Performance appraisals of GS employees on details or temporarily promoted shall be prepared within 30 days after the detail or temporary promotion ends. Article 15 of the CSB CBA also addresses details, promotions, and reassignments.
- e. **Transfers to Another Agency.** When a CSB GS employee transfers to another Federal agency, the CSB will transfer the GS employee's most recent rating of record and any subsequent performance ratings to the gaining agency in accordance with 5 C.F.R. Part 293 and applicable OPM instructions.
- f. **Employee not under Performance Plan for Minimum Appraisal Period.** When a GS employee has not served under a performance plan for their position of record for 90 days by the end of the appraisal period, the appraisal period will be extended to provide for the minimum appraisal period and a rating of record will be prepared at that time. The rating official may take into consideration any summary ratings provided by the GS employee's previous rating official in determining the rating of record.
- g. **Rating official not in Position for Minimum Appraisal Period.** As long as sufficient information is available on which to appraise a GS employee's performance that covers a 90-day minimum period, there is no requirement that the rating official occupy their position for a specific length of time. However, if a performance rating is not available or is not sufficiently developed to permit a performance appraisal, the rating official shall consult OHR for next steps.
- h. **Employee Service on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP).** GS employees who have been given notice of unacceptable performance and an opportunity to improve performance will not receive a rating of record until the PIP expires.

15. RECORDS.

- a. USA Performance governs the routing and ability to track performance plans, progress reviews, and performance appraisals. No other record action is needed.
- b. After completion of the performance appraisal at the end of the appraisal period, a copy of the appraisal will be filed in the GS employee's [eOPF](#) in accordance with the requirements of 5 C.F.R. Part 293, Subpart D.

U.S. CHEMICAL SAFETY AND HAZARD INVESTIGATION BOARD

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