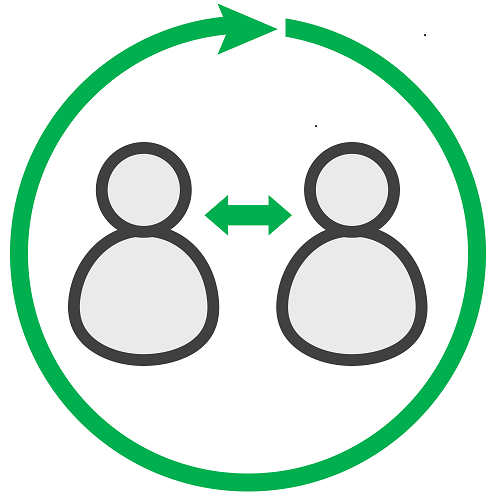
USAID EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS:

GUIDEBOOK FOR EMPLOYEES

A practical guide for employees to understand and succeed with day-to-day performance management

May 2019



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# Employee Performance and Development at USAID

The ability of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to achieve its mission depends on the skills and abilities of its employees. The Employee Performance and Development (EP&D) program is designed to facilitate the growth and development of employees and to ensure employees understand and meet the expectations of their role in support of the Agency mission.

To achieve its intended purpose, the EP&D program:

1. Focuses on meaningful conversations about performance rather than documenting performance.
2. Allows supervisors and managers to frame objectives in a way that makes sense in light of the complexity of the work, the predictability of the work environment, and the expertise and experience of their team.
3. Encourages and empowers employees as well as supervisors to assume responsibility for ongoing feedback, performance management, and individual development.
4. Clarifies processes for dealing with poor performance.
5. Embraces simplicity and reduces complexity as much as possible

Although the purpose of this Guidebook is to describe the EP&D process, the components of the promotion process are also briefly described at the end of this Guidebook because preparing employees for promotions and career challenges down the road is an important part of the EP&D process.

There are three major components to the EP&D process:

1) Set Expectations and Plan for Development,

2) Engage in Ongoing Coaching and Feedback, and

3) Annual Performance Review

This guidebook describes each component and the process for carrying out performance and development activities throughout the performance cycle. It also provides a variety of resources to help you, as an employee, be an effective participant in performance and development activities and to succeed in meeting or exceeding performance expectations and requirements.

# How to Use this Guidebook

This guidebook is a comprehensive resource for understanding USAID’s Foreign Service EP&D process and procedures. Start by reading the guidebook and using the performance and development training resources located [here](https://pages.usaid.gov/HCTM/fs-pm) to build your understanding of the process and how to implement each component. Then, reference specific tip sheets or “how-to guides” included in the guidebook as you participate in performance and development discussions and seek ongoing coaching and feedback throughout the year. ***Please note that supervisors have a guidebook that provides them with similar information about the EP&D process and their responsibilities related to EP&D activities.***

This guidebook includes the following resources associated with each phase of the EP&D process:

**Overview**

* [Employee Performance and Development Process](#_30j0zll)

**Set Expectations and Plan for Development**

* [Preparing for the Annual Expectation Setting and Planning Conversation](#_26in1rg)
* [Tips for Writing Meaningful Expectations](#_3j2qqm3)
* [Seeking Stretch Assignments](#_2xcytpi)

**Engage in Ongoing Coaching & Feedback**

* [Quarterly Conversations](#_qsh70q)
* [Overview of Coaching](#_1pxezwc)
* [Clarifying Expectations](#_49x2ik5)
* [Seeking Feedback](#_2p2csry)
* [Accepting Feedback](#_3o7alnk)
* [Diagnosing Underlying Causes](#_ihv636)
* [Holding Employees Accountable in the Annual Review](#_32hioqz)

**Review Performance**

* [Tracking Accomplishments and Completing the Annual Accomplishments Record](#_1v1yuxt)
* [Effective Annual Review Conversations](#_46r0co2)
* [After the Annual Review Conversation](#_25b2l0r)

# Snapshot of the Employee Performance and Development Process

**3. Review Performance**

**1. Set Expectations & Plan   
for Development**

**2. Engage in Ongoing Coaching & Feedback**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Employees** | * Reflect on work unit priorities, Agency goals, and how your work supports the Mission; note the areas of your work that you think are most important to focus on in the coming year * Reflect on past performance and career aspirations; identify development areas that you want to focus on in the next year * Draft 1 developmental objective and 2 work objectives for review with supervisor in the Quarterly Conversation Record | * As part of ongoing work, seek clarification of expectations and request feedback * Seek out development opportunities where appropriate throughout the year * Proactively offer feedback to your supervisor and your peers | * Reflect on accomplishments throughout the year and areas for improvement * Finalize the Quarterly Conversation Record; complete Annual Accomplishment Record (AAR) to document up to 5 of your significant contributions/accomplishments * Generate ideas for how to continue your development and progress over the next year | |
| **Dialogue** | * Discuss work unit priorities and how the employee’s work contributes to the Agency’s mission * Revise and finalize work objectives * Ensure a clear understanding of expectations and work objectives * Discuss career aspirations, development needs for advancement, and performance improvement areas * Determine appropriate training or developmental opportunities and document in a skill development objective and the Individual Learning and Training Plan (ILTP) | * On an ongoing basis, and at least once per quarter, discuss assignments, expectations, feedback, development progress, or revisit objectives as priorities change and record in the Quarterly Conversation Record * Recognize that feedback should be real-time and progress can be communicated in a variety of methods (e.g., via email, quarterly discussions, project meetings) | * Discuss performance progress, contributions and accomplishments related to objectives and expectations, and how the employee can build on these accomplishments in the following year * Discuss additional resources or support needed by the employee to overcome challenges or meet performance expectations | |
| **Supervisors** | * Communicate Agency and work unit priorities * Think through the employee’s most important work activities and the most important outcomes the employee will need to achieve in the coming year * Identify areas for improvement in employee’s current role * Provide guidance on what should be included in work objectives and define opportunities or training that will help the employee improve or prepare for the next stage in his/her career * Document work objectives in the Quarterly Conversation Record | * As part of ongoing work, reinforce and clarify expectations and provide ongoing coaching and feedback (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly) * Reflect on employee’s progress and collect feedback from others to inform your feedback and coaching, as needed * Provide stretch assignments and development opportunities where appropriate * Hold at least one check-in with the employee each quarter | * Reflect on employee’s performance throughout the year and the skills they have demonstrated relative to the requirements in the FS/SFS Skills Framework and Backstop Competencies * Finalize the Quarterly Conversation Record; provide ratings on the FS subskills and an overall performance rating; review and choose to concur or not concur with AAR statement of accomplishments * Conduct an end of year review conversation to discuss accomplishments and what the employee should think about in preparing for success and growth in the year ahead | |

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# Employee Performance and Development

The EP&D process emphasizes the supervisor’s responsibility to support employees in meeting expectations for high-quality performance through honest feedback, coaching, and development. At the same time, it aims to hold employees accountable for meeting the demands of their jobs and developing the skills needed for success in the Foreign Service. If employees are underperforming, EP&D offers tools for supervisors to work with employees to correct deficiencies, and provides guidance for initiating action to separate employees who are unable to meet performance standards. When employees are ready to compete with their peers for promotion (having met time-in-grade and other promotion eligibility requirements, including a satisfactory performance evaluation), employees and supervisors will complete forms designed specifically to help Promotion Boards assess candidates against the promotion factors outlined in the [ADS 463](https://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/400/463) precepts and identify which of the many high-performing FSOs in each class are ready for immediate promotion.

The forms and processes for EP&D and Promotion have been through an exhaustive process of review, revision, field testing, negotiation, and fine-tuning. This Guidebook begins with an overview of the major changes, and then explains each process in detail, including steps, forms, roles, and the skills needed to effectively implement the process. As EP&D is implemented, the entire Agency will experience the benefits of a system designed to build the capacity of the FS workforce and foster a climate of candid conversations and respectful, collegial professional relationships.

The overarching vision for the two processes is shown below. The rest of the Guidebook describes more specifically what is involved.

Vision for the Two Processes



Better, multi-faceted information for Boards

Standardized review processes

Employees write more, supervisors write less

Input from peers and subordinates

Those who supervise are assessed on supervision

Focus on conversations instead of documentation

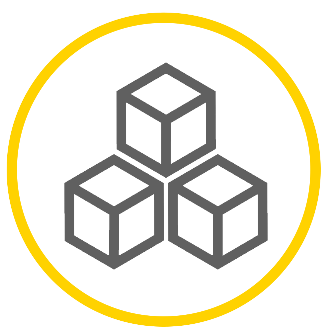
Adaptable objectives - change as priorities change

Feedback is timely and frequent

Shared responsibility and accountability

Simplified, automated forms

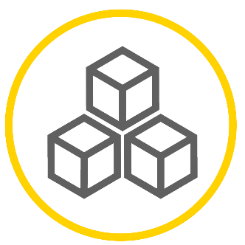
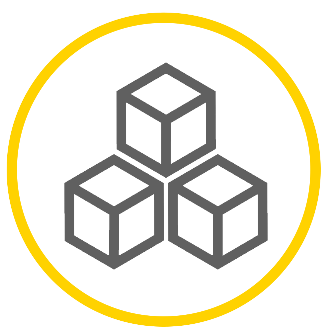
Developmentally focused performance reviews



Skills Framework

FS/SFS Skills

Framework



FS/SFS Skills

Framework

FS/SFS Skills

Framework

FS/SFS Skills

Framework

FS/SFS Skills

Framework

# Roles and Responsibilities

Framework

Framework

In order for EP&D to be successful, a number of different parties must participate and share responsibilities throughout each performance cycle.

Rating Official

* Manage performance for his or her employees
* Partner with employee at beginning of performance cycle to determine objectives and expectations
* Facilitate performance conversations quarterly that cover employee performance, progress, and development
* Have ongoing coaching conversations with their employees with constructive and positive feedback
* Locate stretch assignments for their employees
* Support employees with their skill and career development
* Provide feedback using the FS/SFS Skills Framework and Assessment and the Backstop-specific competencies in the agency Competency Catalog
* Solicit informal 360 feedback to inform Quarterly Conversations and end of cycle performance reviews
* Hold employees accountable for underperformance
* Complete Foreign Service Annual Performance Evaluation forms for their employees
* Review, provide input on, and sign employees’ Annual Accomplishment Records

Employee

* Partner with supervisor at beginning of performance cycle to establish objectives and expectations
* Participate in quarterly conversations regarding their performance, progress, and development
* Request feedback from supervisor and peers
* Provide feedback to supervisor and express support needs
* Take action to correct any performance deficiencies identified
* Find opportunities to build and develop skills (e.g., stretch assignments)
* Reflect on performance and plan for future career and development
* Complete an Annual Accomplishment Record
* Sign or complete the Foreign Service Annual Performance Evaluation Form

An additional responsibility of both parties is to learn how to use ePerformance, the new automated performance management tool that includes the online versions of the forms accessible via links in the Appendix, as well as a tool to facilitate 360 feedback collection. This system allows online access and storage of forms and electronic signatures, and generates reminders and reports on the completion status of required performance management tasks. Both parties are required to complete actions in ePerformance by established deadlines; the system will track completion and allow EXOs and system administrators to provide compliance reports to senior managers for monitoring and follow-up.

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# 1. Set Expectations and Plan for Development

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| --- |
| *Establishing meaningful objectives and expectations, while also focusing on important skill development areas is key to setting the stage for successful performance.* |

**Philosophy**

All employees must uphold USAID’s core values, make meaningful contributions, accomplish work objectives, and demonstrate the skills that are required to perform successfully in their roles.

FS/SFS Skills Framework

FS/SFS Skills Framework describes the skill requirements for FSOs across the grade levels; backstop competencies describe technical skill requirements

Expectations

Performance expectations include the day-to-day responsibilities of the job, contributions to the team, and the work objectives they are assigned.

USAID Core Values

Passion for Mission  
Excellence  
Integrity  
Respect

Empowerment  
Inclusion  
Commitment to Learning

All of these components need to be clearly communicated to ensure employees understand what is expected and how to be successful. Supervisors are accountable for modeling USAID values and fulfilling expectations associated with their *own roles*. In addition, they must articulate the values and skill requirements *to employees* by describing what they mean in behavioral terms and working with employees to establish expectations they will be committed to meeting.

**Process for Setting Expectations and Planning for Development**

1. At the beginning of the EP&D cycle or whenever you move to a new assignment, you and your supervisor meet to:

**Key Idea**

Setting expectations should be a **partnership** between an employee and his or her supervisor. As an employee, you should take an active role in the process.

* 1. Discuss the goals of the Operating Unit, your role in supporting the Operating Unit, immediate or upcoming priorities, and context and constraints.
  2. Reflect on your strengths and development areas and identify one or more areas you will focus on building or enhancing throughout the performance cycle.
  3. Articulate and clarify work objectives and at least one skill development objective.
  4. Discuss shorter-term priorities, project-specific requirements, or other expectations for the first quarter of the year.

1. Using the [Quarterly Conversation Record (QCR)](https://www.usaid.gov/forms/aid-461-4) in ePerformance:
   1. Document in the Quarterly Conversation Record one skill development objective and one or two work objectives that reflect important outcomes the employee needs to achieve.
   2. Record highlights of the discussion around when and how different activities are to be performed, plus priorities, risks and possible resource needs so that both parties clearly understand what needs to be done, and how the most important activities will be carried out.

**Key Term**

**Skill Development Objective**: an objective focused on activities that will help an FSO build relevant knowledge and skills such as those identified in the FS skills framework or a specific area of technical expertise

* 1. Note any challenges, risks, opportunities, resource issues, etc. that may impact progress and need to stay on the employee’s and supervisor’s radar.

Once the conversation has taken place, the employee will enter the date and check the box confirming the date. This will generate a notice to the supervisor, who will then access the QCR to also confirm the date of the conversation. When both have completed this step, ePerformance will show in both the employee and supervisor landing pages, and the dashboard that the required conversation for that quarter took place. If either party does not agree that a substantive conversation took place on the date entered, they need to schedule a second conversation. If either party fails to confirm a conversation date by the last day of the quarter, the record for that quarter reverts to “read only” showing that one or both did not confirm a date.

Note that that the objectives and notes recorded in the QCR are designed to serve the employee and the supervisor in their effort to develop a common understanding of what is needed and expected. The objectives and notes recorded in the QCR do not go to the Promotion Board or into an official personnel file.

The following pages provide a series of tip sheets and guidance for completing these activities.

## Preparing for the Expectation Setting and Planning Conversation

The annual expectation setting and planning conversation is the discussion that you have with your supervisor to establish objectives, review expectations for how work will be accomplished, and develop a plan for supporting your growth and development during the performance cycle.

**Dedicate Time to Prepare**

Preparing for the annual expectation setting and planning conversation does not require a big investment of time, but to ensure you have a productive discussion, you should dedicate time to do the following in advance:

* review the Operating Unit goals and strategic objectives and identify how your work supports work unit and higher level goals,

**Key Terms**

**Objective:** what needs to get done; the target or desired outcome that should guide where the employee focuses his/her time and effort.

**Work Activity**: the action that an employee takes when performing his/her job

**Goals:** Long-term or high-level results that need to be achieved; specifies the *outcome* of a work activity

**Expectations:** Statements that detail what an employee should do and how they should perform in order to be successful

**Priorities:** Statements used to clarify what should be focused on first or which project/activity should receive more time and effort

*People may use terms like goals, objectives, and expectations inconsistently or interchangeably… that’s ok! What is important is that supervisors and employees have a shared understanding of what they are trying to accomplish and who is responsible for what.*

* think through your key projects or most important work activities and their associated outcomes to inform the discussion on work objectives and priorities,
* review the FS/SFS Skills Framework and Backstop Competencies and identify the most critical subskills required for your assignment,
* review 360 feedback and the most recent Skills Assessment, if available, plus any other relevant input on your performance from the previous cycle,
* reflect on your areas of strength and identify areas that you need to improve or build on during the performance cycle,
* identify development opportunities/on-the-job experiences that will help you improve in your current role and/or work toward promotion,
* consider the resources that you will need to be successful and the support you may need your supervisor to provide, and
* draft notes for topics you would like to raise with your supervisor.

**Materials to Bring to the Conversation**

* **Notes on possible performance objectives, expectations, or priorities –** Use the *Tips for Writing Meaningful Expectations* guidance to draftaset of objectives and strategies to review with your supervisor
* **Ideas for training, stretch assignments, or other skill development opportunities** – identify activities that will help you grow and improve skill areas for your current role or in preparation for promotion
* **Questions** – if you have specific questions regarding expectations, objectives, or resources, it may help to bring your notes to ensure you discuss each of them with your supervisor

**Timeframe for the Conversation**

**Key Point**

If an employee moves to a new assignment or there is a change in supervisor any time throughout the year, the employee and new supervisor will be responsible for having an expectations setting and planning conversation within 30 days of the change.

In most cases, expectation setting and planning conversations will take place in the first quarter of the performance cycle and supervisors and employees will establish work and skill development objectives during this Q1 conversation. However, since FSOs can start a new assignment anytime during the year, the objectives and expectations setting conversation may take place during any quarter; the important thing is that it takes place as soon as possible after you arrive at a new post, ideally within the first 30 days.

When the supervisor and employee have been working together for a while, the Q1 Expectation Setting conversation is typically an opportunity to revisit long-term goals, objectives, and priorities from the previous cycle and set new short-term goals. Program and project work cycles seldom naturally align with performance cycle start and end dates, so long-term objectives from one cycle may have activities and milestones that extend into the next performance management cycle. This is fine since the primary purpose of objectives is to help employees determine where and how to allocate their time, energy, and resources.

The Q1 discussions about skill development objectives and opportunities will also typically be a continuation of the Skills Assessment and Annual Review Conversation from the last performance cycle. However, when you are starting a new assignment or getting a new supervisor, it is especially important to use your first quarterly conversation to have a rich and substantive discussion about the requirements of the position, the skills and experience you bring to the job, and the expectations of your new supervisor.

ePerformance allows objectives to be recorded in the objectives block of the QCR during any quarter, and objectives can be changed or edited anytime goals, priorities or circumstances change. However, the text boxes for quarterly conversation notes are only open for one quarter at a time, and once a quarter ends the notes entered during the quarter revert to “read only” mode and the text blocks for the next quarter are opened.

**Example Conversation Topics for Setting Expectations and Objectives**

Although supervisors should have an agenda for the expectation setting conversation, employees have a responsibility too. You need to go into this conversation prepared to answer and ask questions that will stimulate reflection and a productive exchange of ideas about goals, responsibilities, opportunities, and constraints. The objectives and priorities that are established during the conversation need to reflect both current realities and the broader goals of the Mission or Agency.

The conversation may cover the following:

1. Purpose of the conversation
2. Brief review of your accomplishments and skill development areas
3. USAID Core Values, FS/SFS Skills Framework, backstop competencies, and a discussion of how your role and contributions fit within the bigger picture of the Agency
4. A review of your thoughts about objectives, expectations, and priorities
5. Training or skill development experiences that may aid your individual learning
6. Resources needed for your success
7. Next Steps

**Sample Conversation for Annual Expectation Setting and Planning**

A sample conversation structure is provided on the next few pages as an illustration of what can be conveyed in an expectation setting and planning conversation. Not every conversation will flow this way. Every employee is different and you may need to delve more deeply into certain areas with your supervisor or spend less time addressing others. Together, consider important factors (e.g., whether you are new to your position, whether you are ready for more challenge or promotion, whether you are acting in a higher graded position) in determining the best issues to discuss.

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| 1. **Set the Stage for Two-Way Dialogue and Describe the Purpose** | | |
| **Specific Suggestions** | **Sample Supervisor Contributions** | **Sample Employee Contributions** |
| **Express appreciation for meeting and the importance of the Employee Performance & Development process** | *Thanks for taking the time to meet…*  *Our approach to performance and development at USAID is really about enhancing employee development and enabling high performance that results in effective and meaningful contributions to our mission.*  *It is not just about a couple of meetings during the year, it is an important part of my role as a supervisor – providing guidance and resources to help you perform successfully throughout the year.*  *It is also important that you are proactive in seeking guidance when you need it and looking for opportunities that will be engaging and help your development.* | *Thank you for taking the time to meet.*  *Can you explain a little more about our approach to performance and development?* |
| **Discuss the purpose of the meeting and what each person wants to achieve** | *The purpose of this meeting is to discuss expectations and plan for your continued growth and development in the next year.*  *We will establish some annual work objectives and identify a skill development objective that fits with a skill area we agree you should focus on this year.*  *In addition, we’ll discuss priorities and expectations for the work you’ll be doing in the near term.*  *I would like to be sure that we discuss…*  *Is there anything else you’d like to cover?* | *It would be really beneficial to me and my performance going forward if we could also talk about two things….*  *I appreciate having this chance to connect and make sure that we are on the same page moving forward.* |
| **Make clear that this is a two-way dialogue** | *It’s important to me that this is a dialogue, and not a monologue. I’m interested in your input.* | *I appreciate the chance to have an open discussion; I’m interested in your perspective and input as well.* |

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| 1. **Reflect on Accomplishments and Skill Development Areas** | | |
| **Specific Suggestions** | **Sample Supervisor Contributions** | **Sample Employee Contributions** |
| **Briefly review the strengths and development areas discussed in the annual review conversation, including areas to develop moving forward.** | *Strengths:*  *As we discussed before, you have:*   * *consistently demonstrated X behavior… [provide example such as “demonstrated your attention to detail by…”]* * *produced Y deliverable [describe quantity, quality, timeliness]*   *I really appreciate what you have done. This has contributed to the work unit’s success and will be something to build on this coming year.*  *Development Areas:*  *Areas to focus on developing in the coming year are related to:*   * *[behavior] X… [provide a performance example]* * *[deliverable] Y [describe quantity, quality, timeliness]*   *Improving in these areas will… [help you perform better in your current role]… [help prepare you for a future role]* | *Strengths:*  *Thank you; I’ve been very happy to have had the opportunity to use X skill... I look forward to leveraging my skills in this area in the coming year.*  *Development Areas:*  *I would really appreciate the opportunity to work on these skills.*  *I am hoping to identify some good opportunities to develop these skills and would appreciate your input on how to do that.* |
| 1. **USAID Core Values, FS/SFS Skills Framework, and Contributions to the Agency** | | |
| **Specific Suggestions** | **Sample Supervisor Contributions** | **Sample Employee Contributions** |
| **Review the USAID core values and FS/SFS Skills Framework** | *As you know, upholding our values is extremely important to effectively carrying out our mission.*  *I’ve seen you demonstrate these values in your daily work by…*  *How do you see our values playing a role in how you conduct your work?*  *Here are a few subskills that I think are critical to your work:*   * *[Subskill example/definition]* * *In your position and grade, doing this well looks like…* * *I’d like to see you consistently do this by…* | *I agree the values are important because…*  *In my daily work I strive to…*  *What about skills and subskills?*   * *Which subskills do you think are most critical in my position?* * *What is the best way for me to demonstrate this on the job?* |
| **Highlight how the employee contributes to the overall success of the work unit and to USAID’s mission** | *Our work unit’s priorities and goals for the next year include…*  *I see your work linked to these priorities and goals through…*  *Your contributions impact X, which results in greater overall performance by…* | *What do you see as our work unit’s key priorities and goals for the next year?*  *How do you see my work impacting those priorities and goals?* |
| 1. **Objectives, Expectations, and Priorities** | | |
| **Specific Suggestions** | **Sample Supervisor Contributions** | **Sample Employee Contributions** |
| **Discuss each draft objective** | *[If you have asked the employee to draft work objectives before the meeting…] Let’s take a look at the work objectives you drafted. We can work together to finalize them.*  *Here are what I consider to be important priorities for your work in the next year…*  *Compared to last year, the big changes are…*  *What do you think are the most important deliverables/outcomes you can contribute this year?*  *Let’s talk about the draft objectives…*  *For each objective:*   * *Is the requirement and the desired outcome clear?* * *Do you think this is an appropriate method for measuring this objective?* * *What else should we consider?* * *Is this something you agree is important and will be committed to achieving?* * *Which of the FS skills and subskills are required to perform the work reflected in the objective?*   *Is there anything missing? Can I clarify anything about these objectives overall?* | *[If you were asked by your supervisor to draft work objectives before the meeting…] I drafted several work objectives before today. Can we adapt these into my final objectives?*  *What do you see as the highest priority for my work in the coming year?*  *What from last year’s objectives should stay the same?*  *What are the major changes you see needed for the coming year?*  *For each objective:*   * *Could you explain what you mean by…?* * *I think it would also be important to identify…* * *Do you think I will have the resources I need to do this successfully?* * *How do you expect me to demonstrate the FS skills and subskills as I work on achieving this objective?*   *I’m curious about…*  *What about this aspect of my work…?*  *[Summarize your understanding]… Is that accurate?* |
| **Confirm employee’s commitment to achieving the objectives** | *How comfortable are you with this set of objectives?*  *Are these objectives motivating and challenging enough for you to feel engaged?* | *I think these objectives are achievable, and I look forward to contributing to our success.*  *I’d like to also consider X as a way to challenge myself.* |

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| 1. **Individual Learning and Skill Development** | | |
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| **Specific Suggestions** | **Sample Supervisor Contributions** | **Sample Employee Contributions** |
| **Discuss training or stretch assignments that may help the employee improve in needed areas or build FS/SFS core skills and subskills required at the next grade level** | *What are some skills areas that you’d like to improve in this year? Are there any training opportunities that you would like to participate in?*  *In terms of stretch assignments or tasks, I think it would stretch you to do…*  *What training courses have you identified based on what you want to develop?*  *I also think it would be helpful if you…*  *Would you be interested in taking on X to see if it is something you enjoy?*  *Let’s make sure these ideas, and your skill development objective, are documented in your ILTP.* | *I’d be excited about an opportunity to…*  *I think it would help me to take X courses to build my skills in Y.*  *Do you think it would help me improve in X if I were able to work on Y?*  *Here is what I have in my draft Individual Learning and Training Plan (ILTP), can you confirm that these are things that will develop the areas we just discussed?* |
| 1. **Resources for Success** | | |
| **Specific Suggestions** | **Sample Supervisor Contributions** | **Sample Employee Contributions** |
| **Discuss specific ways the supervisor can help or support the employee** | *How can I help?*  *From our conversation it sounds like one thing that might help is…* | *It would be really helpful if you could make sure that I receive X resources…*  *Do you think it would be helpful to…?*  *Can you put me in touch with…?* |
| **Feedback for the supervisor** | *Do you have any feedback for me about how I can better support your success?*  *Are there any instances where it would help for me to communicate in a different way?* | *Thank you for asking. It would really help me if you could…*  *I would appreciate specific feedback about…*  *I am concerned about X, and would appreciate it if you would…* |

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| 1. **Next Steps** | | |
| **Specific Suggestions** | **Sample Supervisor Contributions** | **Sample Employee Contributions** |
| **Discuss communication going forward throughout the year** | *As we move forward throughout the year, it is important that we maintain communication about progress on your objectives and day-to-day work.*  *You can expect to have at least one quarterly conversation so we have some dedicated time to check-in on a variety of topics.*  *I want you to know that I’m committed to providing you with feedback along the way and finding ways to support you. I am also open to receiving feedback from you.* | *Thank you. I appreciate that.*  *I will also seek feedback or let you know if I need additional support.* |
| **Close the conversation** | *Thank you for taking the time to discuss. I am really looking forward to your contributions this year.*  *I hope you will reach out if you need to clarify anything or need additional support.* | *Thank you for taking the time to discuss today.*  *I appreciate your guidance and support.* |

Note: The ILTP (Individual Learning and Training Plan), sometimes called an Individual Development Plan (IDP), is a personal action plan, jointly agreed to by the employee and supervisor, which identifies the employee’s short and long-term career development and learning needs. An ILTP helps the employee and supervisor identify learning needs that support mandatory training, essential competencies, career development, and/or professional growth. It is a plan that allows supervisors to focus limited resources in the area of greatest need. More information on the ILTP and the form itself (AID 400-21 Form) can be found in ADS 458.

## Tips for Writing Meaningful Expectations

**Step 1: Identify 2 to 3 of the most important activities you will perform in the next year and unique opportunities to develop specific skills**

**Key Point**

Supervisors and employees should develop expectations and work/skill objectives collaboratively, but the following steps may be completed in advance of the meeting where objectives are finalized. Keep in mind that the employee’s objectives will NOT be seen by the promotion boards and do not need to be written perfectly.

**The conversation to flesh out and clarify objectives is more important than how they are worded**. There are prompts in the notes blocks of the Quarterly Conversation Record that are intended to serve as reminders of questions that can be useful in clarifying expectations and ensuring that both parties have a common understanding of what’s important and what needs to be accomplished. Asking these questions is a more productive use of time than wordsmithing objectives.

* What tasks or activities are performed most often?
* What opportunities will be available this year that will help develop a skill or set of skills?
* Which are critical for achieving project, work unit, or Agency goals?
* What activities may occur in each quarter? By year end?

*Example:* Lead the design of a new project.

**Step 2: Convert the activities into statements describing the desired outcome of the activity.**

For each activity identified, determine the end product or service delivered and the desired outcome – this is the objective.

* What is produced (e.g., a strategic plan, a report, a record)?
* What is provided (e.g., product delivered, briefings)?
* What effects will be created (e.g., mission support, efficiency increased)?

*Example:* Lead the design of a new project that will increase the productivity and export of high value agricultural commodities, ensuring host country participation and co-funding.

**Step 3: Ensure that you understand what your supervisor expects you to do (e.g., How should you carry out the objective? What is the outcome of the objective?)**

It is important that you and your supervisor have the same understanding about what needs to be accomplished and how it should be accomplished. Therefore, when you and your supervisor write objectives, talk them through and write down any additional clarifying information that may be needed.

* For example, if you will be representing USAID at financial meetings in Country X, it should be made clear by your supervisor about what “representing USAID” means. It could be simply presenting information to the group on a specific topic, or it could be having a more nuanced understanding of USAID’s positions and interests along with the contextual factors that will be influencing the other partners and fully engaging in problem solving and idea generation during the meetings. Another clarifying point could be what decision authority you have while in those meetings.

The table below gives examples of what you should ask yourself when thinking about clarifying objectives.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Questions Helpful in Clarifying Objectives** | |
| **Service-oriented Activities** | |
| Reliability | Do you need to emphasize consistency of performance and dependability? |
| Responsiveness/Timeliness | How ready do you need to be to provide a timely response to requests? What should that timely response look like? |
| Competence | What level of skill and knowledge is required to perform the activity well? Is this something that your supervisor expects that will stretch your skill? |
| Access | Is it important for you to make arrangements to accommodate a colleague, partner, or stakeholder or facilitate contact in some way? |
| Courtesy | Does the situation call for special attention to the level of respect, friendliness, or politeness demonstrated? |
| Communication | Is the ability to listen to and clearly inform customers, stakeholders, partners a key component of success for this activity or project? |
| Customer Focus | Do you need to emphasize understanding the customer’s needs (e.g., learning individualized requirements and meeting them)? |
| Credibility | Does the situation call for special attention to the level of trustworthiness, believability, or honesty demonstrated? |
| Security | Is it important to ensure the customer is free of doubt, risk, or danger (e.g., financial security, confidentiality)? |
| **Product-based Results** | |
| Conformance to Standards/Accuracy | Are there specific standards that the product must meet? Does the situation call for special attention to details and presenting a product that is free of errors? |
| Reliability/Durability | Should specific attention be paid to the dependability or life-expectancy of the product? |
| Appearance/Aesthetics | To what degree are the physical characteristics or layout of the product important? |
| Distinctiveness | Do you need to emphasize the degree to which the product is unique from other similar products or the value the product adds? |
| Usefulness | Do you need to emphasize the degree to which the product meets the specific needs of the customer? |

**Examples of Work Objectives and Expectations Written in the Quarterly Conversation Record**

* Note that in each example below only one work objective is presented, however when you and your supervisor meet you will typically establish two work objectives (in addition to one skill development objective). More than two work objectives may also be articulated if that seems more appropriate, for example when you are responsible for three distinct work streams or projects.
* Note also that objectives are written differently, some are broad, some are specific. Everything you need to say about an objective doesn’t have to be in one sentence. You can clarify in Section 3 (the notes blocks) any strategies, priorities, or milestones, as well as more quantifiable short-term targets and other considerations it may be important to keep in mind.
* The blocks shown below are from the paper version of the Quarterly Conversation Record; the ePerformance version has a different look and feel but consists of text boxes you can type into directly and update as needed. To confirm that a conversation has been conducted and objectives have been established ePerformance simply requires entering and confirming the date the conversation took place.

**For a Program Officer Role:**

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| --- |
| **Section 2 – Objectives** |
| **Objectives:** Record at least one skill development objective and no more than two work-related objectives that the employee is expected to accomplish during the performance cycle. |
| Develop a new Country Development Cooperation Strategy to support the ongoing transition of Country X to post-conflict. |
| *Note: Objectives may be established during in the first quarter of the new performance cycle, or in the first 30 days of a new assignment.* *They may also be modified any time work priorities shift or new constraints or opportunities emerge.* |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Section 3 – Quarterly Conversations** | |
| **Q1: April – June (Objectives & Expectation Setting Conversation) Due NLT June 30** | |
| **Short-Term Priorities, Goals, Expectations**  *Use this space to take notes on where to focus efforts, specific actions or tasks, key interim targets that need to be achieved in support of overarching objectives, etc.* | **Notes on challenges, resources needed, etc.** |
| **Priorities:** Strengthen democratic political processes, support agricultural sector recovery.  **Work/project planning:**  Q1 – Direct the completion of needed sector assessments and initiate stakeholder consultations to ensure that the strategy is informed by local priorities and needs.  Q3 – Develop Strategic Objective framework in collaboration with all mission offices, USG and host country stakeholders.  Q4 – Represent the mission in discussions of drafts with Washington and revise the framework in view of feedback received. | Will have to use draft version of local needs assessment to start – follow-up to get final once completed.  Have had trouble getting key host country stakeholders to meetings – get Alan to set up coffee meeting first, he’s got a great relationship and can smooth the way |

**For a Health Officer Role:**

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| **Section 2 – Objectives** |
| **Objectives:** Record at least one skill development objective and no more than two work-related objectives that the employee is expected to accomplish during the performance cycle. |
| Team’s Goal/Objective: Reduce spread of HIV/AIDS epidemic in Country X by 20%.  Your role: Strategically engage traditional leaders and identify innovative approaches to ensure country buy-in and accelerated progress towards HIV/AIDS epidemic control. |
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| --- | --- |
| **Section 3 – Quarterly Conversations** | |
| **Q1: April – June (Objectives & Expectation Setting Conversation) Due NLT June 30** | |
| **Short-Term Priorities, Goals, Expectations**  *Use this space to take notes on where to focus efforts, specific actions or tasks, key interim targets that need to be achieved in support of overarching objectives, etc.* | **Notes on challenges, resources needed, etc.** |
| **Quarterly targets:**  Q1 – Organize focus group meetings in 3 districts with village heads.  Q2 – Organize x focus groups with youth and religious leaders in y districts.  Q3 – Draft and share paper with participants on the options identified to solicit further feedback. | In youth groups or whenever you’re able to get women to participate make sure to meet with them separately - women tend to be reticent in mixed company.  Suggest trying to schedule a half-day in-person meeting with lots of time for discussion – hard to get comments back on papers we just send out. |

\* When you put in target numbers, be sure to check in to make sure they make sense in light of emerging risks and opportunities down the road. Also, be aware of what is within the employee’s manageable interest.

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**For Technical Officer Role:**

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| --- |
| **Section 2 – Objectives** |
| **Objectives:** Record at least one skill development objective and no more than two work-related objectives that the employee is expected to accomplish during the performance cycle. |
| Support GOFAM initiatives in country X. |
|  |

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| --- | --- |
| **Section 3 – Quarterly Conversations** | |
| **Q1: April – June (Objectives & Expectation Setting Conversation) Due NLT June 30** | |
| **Short-Term Priorities, Goals, Expectations**  *Use this space to take notes on where to focus efforts, specific actions or tasks, key interim targets that need to be achieved in support of overarching objectives, etc.* | **Notes on challenges, resources needed, etc.** |
| **Priorities:**  - Forge new alliances between USAID and the private sector to generate additional social sector investment,  - Leverage USAID assistance for health and education,  - Put the national family planning association, GOFAM, on a solid footing of good governance.  **Work Plan:**  Q1 – Design an alliance-building program to secure private sector funding for GOFAM health and education services.  Q2 – Initiate new program toward goal of raising $5 million by year end.  Q3 – Support GOFAM agreement with terms and cooperative agreement leading toward complete self-financing. | See private sector analysis and review report – we need to get one of the tough ones on board. See which of our FSNs may have useful informal contacts – work with and though them.  Note: $5M is aspirational; will need reality checks as we go along, especially with anticipated currency fluctuations. |

\* Quarterly milestones can be helpful for planning purposes, but be sure to make time to discuss other projects and day-to-day responsibilities as well during Quarterly Conversations. Additionally, often you can’t develop quarterly milestones and will need to figure out what makes sense as you go through the year. See the example below for what this might look like.

**For a Financial Services/Controller Role:**

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| **Section 2 – Objectives** |
| **Objectives:** Record at least one skill development objective and no more than two work-related objectives that the employee is expected to accomplish during the performance cycle. |
| Support Mission partners in achieving target operational and financial capabilities. |
|  |

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| --- | --- |
| **Section 3 – Quarterly Conversations** | |
| **Q1: April – June (Objectives & Expectation Setting Conversation) Due NLT June 30** | |
| **Short-Term Priorities, Goals, Expectations**  *Use this space to take notes on where to focus efforts, specific actions or tasks, key interim targets that need to be achieved in support of overarching objectives, etc.* | **Notes on challenges, resources needed, etc.** |
| 1) provide financial management training to the mission’s partners  2) introduce a risk-based FM monitoring approach which is implemented jointly with partners  3) forge strategic partnerships with various stakeholders including RIG, USAID’s capacity-development implementing partner, and the X government’s Revenue Authority to support the efforts of Mission partners. | We have a number of new awards to local partners coming on line. Need to work with the Agreement Officer and AORs to gauge risk and prioritize.  Ambassador has asked POL/ECON to engage Revenue Authority on X topics: need to make sure our efforts are coordinated with the interagency |

## Seeking Stretch Assignments

**Stretch Assignments Defined**

Stretch Assignmentsfoster your growth by giving you a deliberate opportunity to learn on the job rather than in a training course. This can include both developing ***within*** your current position, and developing ***beyond*** your current position. Stretch assignments often:

* Go beyond your existing responsibilities
* Challenge current skills
* Build additional skills

There are five common characteristics of assignments that will provide challenge and opportunities for skill development:

* *Unfamiliar responsibilities* – Taking on a role or type of work that is outside your typical job requirements
* *Creating change* – Being responsible for facilitating some type of change in the work unit or Agency (e.g., change how business is conducted, fix a problem)
* *High level of responsibility* – Increasing the amount of responsibility beyond what is typical for you (e.g., leading a high visibility project)
* *Working across boundaries* – Working with different partners or with people whom you have had limited interactions with in the past (e.g., participating on a cross-functional initiative)
* *Managing diversity* – Leading or working with people from different cultures and backgrounds, or people who have a very different perspective or mindset

**Request Opportunities When You Feel Ready**

If you feel ready to take on more challenge, be proactive in talking with your supervisor about potential opportunities and volunteering for projects that you think would be beneficial and serve as stretch assignments. This will help ensure that you and your supervisor are on the same page about what is appropriate for you based on your career aspirations, and at the same time, consistent with mission needs.

* What knowledge or skill areas do you need to develop?
  + - Look for assignments in your current role that will test these skills.
    - Look for opportunities to contribute to tasks that are normally completed by a peer in another department or by an associate at the next level up from your role.
* Be willing to take on assignments that are outside of your comfort zone.
  + - Do your best, but recognize that mistakes are more likely to happen in a stretch assignment. View those mistakes as learning opportunities and reflect on what you will do differently the next time.
    - Ask to be paired with another more experienced team member if you think the assignment is too far beyond your comfort zone.
* Find a mentor who can provide advice and support during your stretch assignment.

## GAPS Model

When planning for development, the *GAPS model* (Goals & Values, Abilities, Perceptions, and Success Factors) depicted below can be a helpful tool to increase self-reflection and self-insight. The reflective process captures strengths and opportunities that can be used to identify and prioritize development areas. This can include building new skills and taking on more challenges within your current position, as well as thinking about what positions you may want to pursue in the future. Take the time to write down responses to the questions in each category and then answer the questions on the next page.

**GOALS & VALUES**

The motivators that energize and drive your behavior, including your interests, values, desires, work objectives, and career aspirations.

What personal interests and values are critically important to you?

What do you like and dislike about the work you have done?

What are your career aspirations and ambitions?

**ABILITIES**

Your view of your capabilities, style, and performance.

What are you good at? Think in terms of categorizing your skills and abilities as *very strong*, *solid*, and *needs work*.

What special qualities and abilities do you bring to the Agency? Where have you demonstrated them?

What have you been praised for?

In order to focus on continuing career growth, what do you need to be doing better right now?

**PERCEPTIONS**

How others view your capabilities, performance, style, motives, priorities, and values.

What do you know about how others (peers and internal customers) view you?

How would you gather additional feedback on your past and current performance to help make better decisions about your future?

Who could help you improve your understanding of other’s perceptions?

**SUCCESS FACTORS**

The Agency’s standards for you, as defined by your role and responsibilities, cultural norms, and other people’s expectations.

What will USAID need from you and others to succeed in the future?

What does the organization value?

How is success defined? What do you need to be good at in order to succeed?

As you dream about what you would like to do in the future, what are the main things you need to learn to be successful?

## Identifying Development Areas

Once you have thought about your strengths and opportunities for each GAPS category, take some time (maybe 15 or 30 minutes) to use this information to help you identify potential areas for your development.

***What might your GAPS analysis look like?***

**Abilities vs. Goals**

You want to work in a liaison role but struggle with interpersonal skills

You want to become a subject matter expert on your team, but you lack experience in a specific process for which your team is responsible

**Abilities vs. Success Factors**

You have strong writing skills, but your current role demands primarily telephone communication

You have strength in innovation, but your role requires strict adherence to set policies and procedures

**Abilities vs. Perceptions**

You feel that your writing skills are strong, but you received recent feedback from a colleague that you could improve in this area

You feel that you are a strong collaborator, but your supervisor has provided you with feedback that you should consider involving others in your work more often

To **determine** development areas consider:

Where are the potential “gaps”?

* Goals vs. Abilities
* Goals vs. Perceptions
* Goals vs. Success Factors
* Abilities vs. Perceptions
* Abilities vs. Success Factors
* Success Factors vs. Perceptions

To **prioritize** development areas consider:

1. Which potential “gaps” are most critical to you?
2. Which potential “gaps” might be most critical to your team, your Mission, USAID as a whole?
3. Which “gaps” could make the biggest difference to you in achieving your career aspirations?
4. What additional feedback or information do you need to gather?

Note: The GAPS model has been adapted for use in several contexts, but it is most widely used in executive coaching. The model was developed by Peterson and Hicks in 1996.

**Peterson**, **D. B.**, & **Hicks**, M. D. (**1996**). Leader as coach: Strategies for coaching and developing others. Minneapolis, MN: Personnel Decisions International.

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| --- |
| **Tip: Document your progress** |
| As you take on new challenges and achieve success on the job, make note of your accomplishments. When it comes time to have a conversation with your supervisor about your interest in new assignments, or whether you are ready for a new role, this record will help you demonstrate your capability and readiness. This can also inform your discussion with your supervisor about your progress and what development opportunities you are ready to pursue next. |

# 2. Engage in Ongoing Coaching and Feedback

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| *Ongoing, informal coaching and feedback leads to greater performance improvements than formal feedback that occurs one or two times per year because it facilitates just-in-time learning and encourages a positive, trusting relationship between a supervisor and an employee.* |

**Coaching & Feedback is the Key Component of Effective Performance Management**

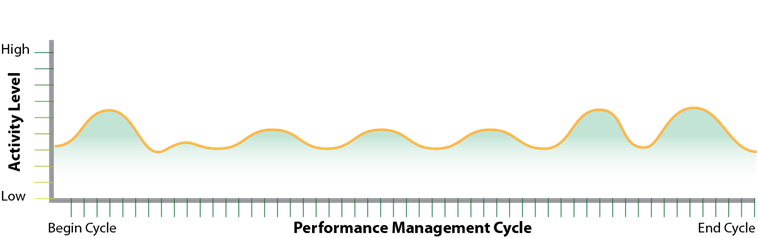
Traditional approaches to performance management, including USAID’s old AEF system, require a planning session, a mid-year review (often delayed or neglected altogether), and a final performance review session. However, research shows that this approach is not only frustrating to supervisors and employees, it is *ineffective* for actually changing behavior or improving performance.

Traditional PM Process Illustration



A consistent level of informal coaching and feedback, delivered effectively, is the single most important driver of performance improvements (Corporate Leadership Council, 2014). This set of tips and tools is designed to encourage you to take advantage of additional opportunities as they arise in day-to-day interactions and to help you execute these conversations effectively.





Ideal PM Process Illustration

## Quarterly Conversations

Corporate Leadership Council (2014). *Conducting Effective Performance Conversations: Six Imperatives for Driving Enterprise Contribution through Performance Discussions.* Corporate Executive Board.

**What are quarterly conversations?**

Quarterly conversations are designed to facilitate ongoing feedback and discussions that will support having the “ideal PM process” take place throughout USAID. At least once per quarter, you and your supervisor will have an official “quarterly check-in” in which you will have either a targeted conversation or discuss one or more topics (as described in more detail below).

Q1: Apr - Jun

Set Expectations & Plan for Development

Q4: Jan – Mar

Annual Review Conversation\*

Q2: Jul - Sept

Quarterly   
Check-in

Q3: Oct - Dec

Quarterly   
Check-in

Agency Mission,   
FS Skills & Backstop Competencies

Ongoing Feedback

Ongoing Feedback

Ongoing Feedback

The quarterly conversations will be documented using the [Quarterly Conversation Record](https://www.usaid.gov/forms/aid-461-4). You are not required to provide extensive documentation or narratives, but the form includes space for documenting priorities, goals, and expectations, as well as notes about your progress throughout the year. You are encouraged to use the space provided to create a record that you and your supervisor can refer to when clarifying expectations and reviewing performance at the end of the year.

The Quarterly Conversation Record is not included in the promotion package that you submit to the Promotion Boards when you are eligible for promotion. It is meant to be a resource used by you and your supervisor to facilitate the EP&D process.

**Completing quarterly conversations**

**Key Tip**

Employees are encouraged to seek out and request feedback from others

Asking for feedback helps to reduce potential negative emotional reactions to receiving constructive feedback

Requested feedback is more easily accepted; therefore, creating an environment where asking for feedback is the norm can assist in performance improvement

Learning about the brain changes everything: David Rock at TEDxTokyo

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDIyxxayNig

In the first quarter, check-ins will be focused on discussing expectations and planning for the year ahead. In the second and third quarters, the format and content of the discussion is more flexible and can focus on several different topics:

* + Discussing performance and progress to date
  + Revisiting and adding or modifying goals, expectations, or priorities as needed
  + Assessing resource needs, possible risks to mitigate and opportunities to leverage
  + Considering any 360 feedback that your supervisor may have received or solicited. Please Note: Rating officials are prohibited from soliciting direct or indirect 360-degree feedback from implementing partners on the performance of Contracting/Agreement Officers (COs/AOs) and Contracting Officer’s Representatives/Agreement Officer's Representatives (CORs/AORs). Reviewing Multisource Ratings\* from the previous “promotion eligible” year and using them to establish developmental goals and expectations
  + Discussing developmentally-oriented topics
    - opportunities to deepen FS/SFS skills
    - strategies to master technical competencies
    - alignment of work with USAID’s mission and strategy
    - one thing to continue/start/stop doing to achieve results using the FS/SFS Skills Assessment

Quarterly conversations are a great time to revisit the little changes you planned to make, new strategies or behaviors you were going to try out. Did you follow through? How did it go?

\* Multisource Ratings (MSRs) are ratings collected from supervisors, peers, and subordinates (where applicable) once year just before Promotion Boards meet to complete Promotion Packages for those employees who are eligible for promotion. Summary reports are shared with employees and their supervisors and can be useful in discussions about skill development objectives and/or progress on those objectives. See ADS 463 for additional information on MSRs.

***The Big Picture*: Each check-in conversation can focus on performance, on development, or ideally some combination of these. Work together with your supervisor to uncover what is most timely and relevant for you, and together you can structure the conversation accordingly.**

**"Focus on performance" conversations**

Work performance

Challenges faced

Shifts in resources

Recent accomplishments and contributions

Performance goals for upcoming quarter

Clear expectations

**"Focus on development" conversations**

Professional development opportunities

Investing in skills

Lessons learned from everyday tasks

What motivates me?

Focus on growth and career path

***Best Practice Tips:***

Don’t wait for your supervisor to initiate all conversations – speak up and ask for feedback when you want it.

Touch base frequently and informally for ‘just in time” feedback

## Overview of Coaching

**What is coaching?**

Coaching is a key part of every supervisor’s job. Coaching has a much greater potential to foster high performance than a leadership style that relies on specific direction and oversight. But what exactly does coaching look like? The foundation of ongoing and effective coaching begins with questions - encouraging employees to think through problems and reflect on their own performance and their impact on others. Then, as needed, the coaching supervisor will add their own feedback, advice, and encouragement. Supervisors should provide all three of the following types of coaching, depending on the individual and the situation:

**Best Practice Tip**

Use the space on the Quarterly Conversations Record to document feedback conversations with supervisors throughout the year. Include:

dates

key ideas

next steps

mutual responsibilities

Reference at year end when preparing for annual review conversations.

* Brief, often spontaneous conversations designed to quickly share knowledge relevant to a specific problem or help you identify new possibilities (i.e., point-in-time coaching);
* Planned, guided discussions intended to accomplish a specific goal such as addressing a performance issue or helping you to identify career aspirations;
* Thought-provoking questions designed to help you discover the “right” answer yourself.

**Coaching Conversations**

With our new approach to performance and development, supervisors are encouraged to provide coaching throughout the year. You should expect that your supervisor will look for opportunities to give positive reinforcement when you have performed well, and help you work through problems or identify an effective approach when you need advice or assistance. Few supervisors come into the job with a well-practiced set of coaching skills, however. You can support your supervisor’s efforts to develop coaching skills and develop your own skills at the same time by asking your supervisor to help you think through options for dealing with tough situations, requesting specific feedback on skills you are trying to develop, and responding thoughtfully to open-ended questions your supervisor may pose during quarterly conversations.

|  |
| --- |
| **To get the most out of a coaching conversation, keep the following tips in mind:** |
| * Begin by reflecting on ***your*** role in the coaching process – define and communicate the type and level of coaching that you prefer. * Articulate your goals for the particular situation or issue you are discussing. * Explain the current state of the situation in order to fully explore all of the issues or perspectives. * Discuss potential solutions, even ideas that may not seem feasible based on what you currently know. * Be open and responsive when your supervisor asks questions and talks through potential solutions with you. * Talk through how you want to move forward, leveraging your strengths, and what support you may need to implement the solution. |

## Clarifying Expectations

Clarifying objectives and expectations for work activities should be a regular, ongoing activity, so make it a habit to ask questions or restate requests to provide clarity and mutual understanding for how to complete your daily work. When collaborating with your colleagues or coaching your peers, keep the following principles in mind:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **1** | **Identify the specific task or action to be accomplished** | Clearly ask and restate what you are being asked to do. Ask additional questions if necessary. |
| **2** | **Clarify who is doing the requesting and who should carry out the task** | Be clear about where the task has originated and what the roles and responsibilities are of each person working on the task. |
| **3** | **Ensure a shared context and understanding** | Ask for background and contextual information; request that terms be defined if needed. |
| **4** | **Define a successful outcome** | Be sure to ask for clear indicators of quantity, quality, and timeframe. Determine who is impacted if appropriate. |
| **5** | **Obtain a clear agreement** | Ensure that you indicate to your supervisor whether you agree to the task completely, want to offer a counter-proposal (e.g., negotiated timelines), would like to provide an answer at a later date, or that you cannot carry out the task as requested and what you will need to do so. |

**It is also helpful to ask your supervisor direct questions to ensure that you understand what you are accountable for in your role and how you are expected to fulfill your responsibilities. Sample** **questions include:**

* *Am I performing consistently at the level expected of me?*
* *Do I regularly complete daily assignments with the speed and quality appropriate for my role?*
* *Do I contribute what others need from me to complete their own work?*
* *I plan to begin this task by… Does that sound like an appropriate way to start?*
* *Is there any broader contextual information that I should consider in determining the best approach for this deliverable?*
* *Is anyone else contributing to…? Do you have a preference for how I coordinate with…?*
* *What is the audience for this…? Is there anyone else that should be included?*
* *Will the outcome impact…?*
* *Do you want to see an early draft, or just the final product? How often would you like updates?*
* *I plan to incorporate… in my solution – do you agree with my strategy? Anything I should* ***not*** *incorporate?*
* *What is the due date? What are the factors driving this due date?*
* *It sounds like I may need… to complete this assignment. Who should I contact to obtain…?*

## Seeking Feedback

**Why does Feedback Make Us Uncomfortable?**

Conversations about performance are often avoided. One of the most common reasons that supervisors and employees avoid them is: ***they make people feel uncomfortable.***When we feel as though our performance is being evaluated or judged, this can lead to a physiological threat or stress response and feelings of defensiveness. This creates a problem – a person’s receptiveness to valuable feedback is reduced to near zero if defensive reactions have kicked in.

But you can turn this dynamic around. Try not to see constructive feedback as a personal attack – remember that your supervisor is trying to help you when he or she offers feedback. Open yourself up to receiving his or her observations and advice about the positive changes that you can make to improve your performance. Think about feedback as a way to gauge the distance between where you are now and where you need and want to be – an indicator of how close you are to achieving your goals or optimal performance. Feedback can let you know what you need to change – and what you should keep doing – to close this gap, perform at your best, and enable USAID’s success.

**How can I ask for feedback from my supervisor?**

**Good questions to get you started**

“What is one thing that I could or should do differently next time when doing task X?”

“What is one thing that you think I should do more often? Less often?”

“If I wanted to build one particular skill to increase my effectiveness, what would you recommend?”

“Would you be open to me trying to do this a different way?”

**How Do You Feel About Feedback?**

Take a few minutes and think about your answers to the following:

* *Do you value feedback?*
* *When you receive feedback, do you use it?*
* *Do you actively seek it out?*

If you responded “yes” to those questions, then you have a strong ‘feedback orientation.’ If you responded with answers indicating you feel more negatively about feedback, then you have a tendency to shy away from feedback.

Why is this important? Feedback about your job performance is more likely to help you develop and improve your skills than any other type of learning (e.g., attending training courses or conferences) because it is specific and directly linked to your behavior.

Therefore, to learn and grow, putting effort toward developing a stronger feedback orientation will benefit you in long run. To develop your feedback orientation:

* Ask for feedback more often
* Ask for feedback from peers and subordinates as well as your supervisor
* When you receive feedback,
  + Really listen
  + Practice being open and accepting
  + Ask clarifying questions
* Move past any emotional reaction and give yourself time to digest the feedback
* Show others that you put their feedback to good use

**Initiate Feedback Conversations**

Usually, it is assumed that a supervisor will initiate and lead feedback conversations. It is actually more productive for employees and supervisors to partner in these discussions and for employees to seek feedback consistently. Use the steps below to be an active participant in obtaining feedback that will help you learn:

**Steps for an Effective Feedback Conversation**

1. Plan

Proactively request performance conversations with your supervisor

Discuss how frequently you would like to have routine feedback conversations

2. Ask

Seek feedback and coaching from peers and summarize the feedback for your supervisor

Take time to digest peer feedback and note key themes to help you organize your thoughts

3. Describe

Drive the conversation by creating talking points for the discussion beforehand

Bring a list of questions and refer to it as needed to ensure that you address all the points that you want to cover

4. Listen

Clearly articulate your objectives and priorities to your supervisor during the conversation

Ask your supervisor probing questions about what he or she thinks are your most important priorities

5. Agree

Document action items and keep them easily accessible after the conversation

Refer back to your list on a regular basis and note your progress on key items

Record examples of progress on items discussed for future conversations

*Note. If the issue is serious (e.g., sexual harassment, threat of violence, discrimination, bullying), you should not try to handle the situation alone. Seek help from Employee and Labor Relations (ELR) and/or Office of Civil Rights and Diversity (OCRD), as appropriate.*

## Accepting Feedback

Feedback can be delivered in a variety of ways: formally or informally, verbally or in writing, etc. Regardless of how it’s delivered, the content of feedback typically falls into one of three categories:

1. Appreciation, thanks, or recognition for a job well done.
2. Guidance and coaching that is intended to improve performance and/or help people learn, grow, or change.
3. Evaluation that provides a judgment of performance or behavior.

While the first two categories of feedback are often welcomed, the third can sometimes feel threatening and demotivating, especially if it is not delivered effectively. We can’t always choose the type of feedback we receive or how it’s delivered. These tips can help you get the most out of whatever feedback you receive so that you can use it as an opportunity to learn.

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| **Tip** | **Examples** |
| 1. Recognize when you are receiving feedback and its purpose. If you are not sure, repeat back what you are hearing to make sure you heard it correctly. | “Which of my actions were most effective? What behaviors should I continue to demonstrate?"  “It sounds like you are saying that my performance needs to improve. Am I hearing that right?” |
| 1. Seek to understand the feedback. Instead of jumping to defend yourself or argue with the feedback giver, say “tell me more” until you are sure you thoroughly understand what is being communicated. Ask for examples to clarify what the feedback-giver means. | “You said you want me to take more initiative. Could you say a bit more about that? Can you please give me some examples of what you mean? I want to make sure I understand.” |
| 1. Ask for advice on what more effective behavior looks like and how it is different from current behavior. | “What specific actions could I take that would demonstrate to you that I’m taking more initiative?” |
| 1. Assess your reaction to the feedback and be honest about what you are feeling. Ask for time to think about the feedback and set up another time to discuss it if you don’t feel you can productively engage in the discussion. | “I have to admit I’m surprised to hear this. I was not aware that I wasn’t meeting your expectations. Let me give this some thought and come back to you with some questions and ideas for how to improve.” |

**Feeling Defensive or Upset**

If you find yourself becoming defensive or upset by the feedback, try these techniques to help manage your emotions:

* **Give yourself time to let your emotional reaction pass.** Ask your supervisor to schedule another time to discuss the feedback after you have had enough time to digest the information and you feel calmer.
* **Separate the message from the messenger.** Don’t let your feelings about the person giving the feedback make you blind to the possibility that there is truth in what you are hearing. Take a step back and think about how you would feel if this feedback came from somewhere else.
* **Keep the feedback in perspective.** Recognize if you have a tendency to over-react to feedback. Separate what you are actually hearing from the story you are telling yourself about it. Contain your story by describing what the feedback is and is not about (e.g., “This feedback is about my supervisor wanting me to solve problems more independently. This feedback is not about my knowledge, skill, or desire to do a good job.”) Think about how you can leverage your strengths to address the issues your manager has presented.
* **Ask for support if needed**. Seek out a trusted mentor or peer to discuss your feelings and get an objective perspective about the feedback and how you are handling it.

**Handling Feedback that is Not Delivered Well**

While you are not able to control how feedback is delivered, you can control how you respond. Here are a few tips for how to handle feedback when it is not communicated in an ideal way:

* Wait for your immediate emotional reaction to pass
* Talk to a peer or mentor before circling back with your supervisor
* Ask for specific examples
* Ask good, open-ended questions to clarify
* Make the conversation forward-looking (e.g., *“If this were to happen again tomorrow, what do you think I should do differently?”)*

**When It Is Your Turn to Offer Feedback**

Sometimes, you may be asked to offer feedback to your supervisor or to or about your colleagues. When you do, try to offer feedback that is *specific, behavioral, constructive,* and *timely*:

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| **Specific** | * The more specific feedback is the easier it is to take action on * Tells the recipient exactly what he/she did well or poorly and why it matters * Allows the recipient to understand what he/she did well or poorly and what needs to be done differently next time |
| **Timely** | * Feedback should be given as soon as possible after an event or experience occurs * The longer you wait, the less likely the recipient will remember the event or have an opportunity to take action based on the feedback |
| **Behavioral** | * Feedback should be directed at actions and behaviors, not someone as a person (e.g., personality or ability) * Feedback is based on accurate observations of the other person’s behaviors – not broad generalizations |
| **Constructive** | * Feedback should never make the other person feel cut down or demoralized * It should be given in a way that helps the recipient learn, understand, develop, and improve performance |

## Diagnosing Underlying Causes

If you recognize that you are having a hard time performing a task or meeting expectations, it may be helpful for you to try and diagnose the underlying cause so you can be an active participant in responding to feedback or engaging in a coaching discussion to devise a solution. Use the chart below to help identify what might be going on, and to be proactive in identifying solutions that might work.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Motivation** | **Environment** | **Knowledge** | **Skill** |
| * Do I want to complete the task? * Do I feel that my work is valued? * Do I enjoy working with colleagues? * Has my supervisor clearly explained how my responsibilities connect to the Agency’s overall strategy? * Do I have the ambition to be successful? * Do I feel challenged? * Are personal issues affecting my work? * Does my personality clash with other team members’? * Do I feel like I am making a difference at USAID? * Am I putting things in the proper perspective? | * Is my job relevant to current Agency demands? * Are internal processes efficient and clear to me? * Are there clear reporting lines within my work unit and USAID as a whole? * Does the Agency’s infrastructure allow me to fulfill my responsibilities? * Am I experiencing conflicting priorities? * Are bureaucratic factors inhibiting my work? * Do I have access to the resources I need? * Is my manager giving consistent messages across the team? * Am I feeling overwhelmed because it is peak season for my work unit, or is this an ongoing challenge? | * Has my supervisor clearly explained his or her expectations and priorities to me? * Do I have the information that I need to make decisions? * Do colleagues and I have a mutual understanding of our strengths and weaknesses? * Am I receiving adequate on-the-job training? * Do I understand when and how to use available technology? * Do I understand my role and responsibilities? * Does my supervisor give me feedback on a regular basis? | * Do I understand how to complete the task? * Have I received all necessary training? * Am I comfortable with the technology requirements? * Do I have good time management skills? * Am I able to communicate effectively with other team members? * Have I completed a similar task in the past? * Does my supervisor give assignments to stretch my abilities? * What skills do I already have that I can leverage on this task? |
| **Potential Solutions:**   * Have an honest discussion with colleagues about interpersonal conflicts. * Talk to your supervisor about your career aspirations and mutually identify opportunities to support them. | **Potential Solutions:**   * Assess whether your responsibilities are clear and reasonable, and discuss any issues with your supervisor. * Ask for any resources that you need to do your job better. * Consult with peers or mentors who have experience working in this environment. | **Potential Solutions:**   * Ask questions to clarify your role and responsibilities. * Ask for feedback from your colleagues and supervisor, and offer it in return. | **Potential Solutions:**   * Identify training opportunities that will build your skillset and present them to your supervisor. * Share your technical skills with colleagues and ask them to do the same. |

# Review Performance

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| *While informal conversations throughout the year are vital for receiving ongoing coaching and feedback, a formal annual review conversation is an important opportunity to take stock of the past year and set the stage for the year to come.* |

Reviewing performance at the end of the year is an opportunity for supervisors and employees to pause and reflect, review and recognize contributions and accomplishments, and identify areas for growth and development from a future-oriented perspective. As part of the end-of-year review process, supervisors will provide an overall Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory performance rating to each employee on the Annual Performance Evaluation form. In addition, supervisors will engage in a formal annual review conversation with each employee. This conversation should focus on major accomplishments against objectives, expectations, milestones, and areas for growth, and also set the stage for a discussion of the employee’s career aspirations, and professional development efforts and objectives.

The goal for this step in the Employee Performance and Development process is to have a conversation that recognizes the employees’ efforts, highlights lessons learned, and serves as a foundation for future planning. Here are a few key points to remember as you plan for the end-of-year evaluation and conversation:

* There should be no major surprises in the annual review conversation. It should not be the first time that accomplishments are recognized or performance issues are addressed.
* You should be having regular conversations with your supervisor throughout the year as opportunities for positive and constructive feedback arise, and you may want to reference the highlights and outcomes of these conversations.
* The tools and guidance in this section describe how to prepare for an effective annual review conversation and complete the required end-of-year forms. Your supervisor has guidance materials that will help prepare him or her for this process as well.

**Philosophy for Conducting Reviews**

The EP&D approach emphasizes the activities that matter most in helping individuals achieve high performance, while also minimizing administrative burdens. The latest best practice research shows that programs that shift the focus from administrative requirements to informal behaviors (e.g., feedback and coaching) that are executed throughout the year result in the behavior change supervisors want to see from their staff.

USAID’s approach still includes some administrative requirements (e.g., employees briefly document their accomplishments and supervisors provide ratings on FS Skills as well as an overall performance rating), but the key to making the end of cycle review a positive, engaging experience is to keep the conversation forward looking (e.g., what did we learn that we can build on next year?). It is also important for both employees and supervisors to recognize that this should not be viewed as a “check-the-box” activity, but an essential part of the overarching performance and development process.

## Annual Performance Evaluations

**Annual Performance Evaluation Rating**

An annual performance evaluation is required at the end of every performance cycle and must be included in the employee’s personnel file. A link to the PDF fillable form of the [Foreign Service Annual Performance Evaluation Form (APE)](https://www.usaid.gov/forms/aid-461-1) is provided here, however, end-of-year evaluations will be completed in the automated performance management system, ePerformance.

The new Annual Performance Evaluation form will simply capture your supervisor’s assessment that your performance is or is not “Satisfactory.” A “Satisfactory” rating means that you are meeting the basic expectations for the job and demonstrating the skill proficiency levels expected of an employee at your grade. The FS/SFS Skills Assessment, 360 feedback obtained throughout the year, the Annual Accomplishment Record, and notes in the Quarterly Conversation Record will all serve as reference documents for the performance evaluation conversation, and they may, of course reflect a much higher level of performance than just “Satisfactory.”

The use of a “Satisfactory” or “Unsatisfactory” rating meets Foreign Service Act requirement for an annual rating of record for each employee. It also greatly streamlines the rating process and, consistent with Employee Performance and Development best practices, replaces the traditional focus on documentation with a focus on meaningful conversations. If the employee’s performance is satisfactory, no explanation or second-level review is required; the “Satisfactory” box on the Annual Performance Evaluation is checked, both parties sign (electronically in ePerformance), and the form is entered into the employee’s official personnel file.

Simplifying the rating process and eliminating the requirement for a narrative is intended to create the time and space for more substantive, meaningful, and candid discussions about strengths and weaknesses, lessons learned from mistakes or feedback, and career and professional development goals. Accomplishments and contributions also need to be reviewed and discussed and they will be captured by the employee in the Annual Accomplishment Record. This is the only document from the Employee Performance and Development process that goes to the Promotion Board when employees are eligible for promotion.

**Unsatisfactory Performance**

There will be cases where an unsatisfactory annual performance evaluation will be warranted. However, an “Unsatisfactory” rating may not be assigned unless the employee has been notified that certain aspects of his/her performance are deficient and given an opportunity to improve. This opportunity is formalized with clear expectations and a start and end date in a formal Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). An “Unsatisfactory” rating is not allowed unless the employee has failed to improve while on a PIP. When this is the case, the supervisor must provide a narrative explanation with a rationale for the unsatisfactory rating and the actions taken to address the performance issue.

Additional information regarding PIPs and next steps is provided in [ADS 464](https://www.usaid.gov/who-we-are/agency-policy/series-400), but supervisors are advised that the first step is always to contact HCTM to determine if a PIP is the best course of action and ensure that appropriate pre-PIP steps (e.g., performance counseling) have been taken. Supervisors are also strongly urged to not wait until the end of the performance cycle before initiating a PIP if performance is falling below the satisfactory level. In fact, a PIP cannot be instituted during the last 30 days of the performance cycle because the evaluation period can only be extended 60 days into the next cycle and PIPs allow for a 90 day improvement period.

## Tracking Skills and Accomplishments

**Skills Assessment**

The purpose of the [FS Skills Assessment](https://www.usaid.gov/forms/aid-461-3) is to help prepare for and support the annual evaluation and end-of-year review conversation. The form is designed to guide this important conversation, by listing each core skill and subskill and actions the employee can take in each area: Grow/Improve, or Stay on Track, or Coach/Mentor Others. Individuals who are meeting the expectations for their grade, based on the proficiency indicators in [the FS/SFS Skills Framework](https://pages.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/fs-sfs_skills_framework-461mad_05-18_0.pdf) and the Backstop Competency Catalog will receive a check mark in the “Stay on Track” column. The supervisor’s assessment, informed by 360 feedback throughout the year, will provide a foundation for discussing the employee’s growth and development needs, as well as opportunities to leverage or enhance a strong skill areas (e.g., by coaching and mentoring others). The assessment is required at the end of each performance period, but it stays between the supervisor and employee and is not included in the documentation that goes into the employee’s official personnel file or to the Promotion Board.

**Quarterly Conversation Record**

The Quarterly Conversation Record (QCR) is used primarily to capture notes from quarterly conversations, including work objectives and skill development objectives, but also strategies and priorities, anticipated challenges and risks, resources needs, etc. It may be useful to refer to these notes at the end of the performance cycle, but their primary purpose is to encourage conversations throughout the year that will increase the likelihood that efforts will reflect current priorities and result in successful outcomes. A review of the notes may reveal operating assumptions, plans, and challenges that warrant reflection and discussion. The QCR is not placed in the employee’s official personnel file, and neither the notes nor the objectives recorded there are forwarded to the Promotion Boards.

**Annual Accomplishment Record**

The [Annual Accomplishment Record (AAR)](https://www.usaid.gov/forms/aid-461-5) is completed at the end of every year, *and* every time an employee completes an assignment, leaves an assignment early, or changes supervisors. A new AAR is required whenever an employee is on a new assignment or with a new supervisor for 60 days or more. If the duration of the assignment or time with a new supervisor is less than 60 days, or within 60 days of the end of the performance cycle the employee may elect not to complete an AAR for that time period. AARs are required during long-term training assignments, but are not required for the period of time an employee is in language training. Previously completed and signed AARs can be retrieved and viewed but not edited.

The AAR is meant to be an overall summary of an employee’s contributions. While the employee is responsible for documenting up to five significant contributions or accomplishments, their supervisor must review the form and sign it to indicate that they agree that the narrative accurately represents the employee’s significant contributions and accomplishments under their supervision during the performance cycle.

It is recommended that you don’t wait until the end of the year to start the AAR or discuss significant contributions with your supervisor, but that you record significant things you have accomplished every quarter. At the end of the year you can then add, edit, and revise to finalize your list.

In preparing or finalizing the AAR, you should look back at your activities and deliverables, feedback you’ve received on your work and contributions to key projects and results, and notes from your Quarterly Conversation Records. You might ask yourself the following as you reflect back across your accomplishments:

* What did you accomplish against work or performance objectives this year? What else did you accomplish that wasn’t captured in your objectives? How did you contribute to the success of others?
  + Why were these contributions important?
  + How were you able to accomplish them?

Your AAR should be:

* Focused on results and the impact of the work performed
* Reflective of how you demonstrated USAID’s values and work expectations
* Succinct, but supported by behavior-based examples

You may want to structure your AAR using the STAR format to ensure you write complete descriptions of your accomplishments and actions.

***Use the STAR Method to Track Accomplishments***

**S = Situation**: What were the conditions under which you were working?

**T = Task**: What was the task? Was there anything unique about the task?

**A = Action**: What activities did you perform to complete the task? What was your role on the team and how did you contribute to the team effort? What behaviors did you demonstrate, and were they in line with USAID’s values and FS skill requirements?

**R = Results**: What was the outcome? Who benefited?

Some additional helpful hints are:

* Read the instructions carefully
* Pay attention to word limits (a maximum of 75 words allowed for each entry) and the maximum number of entries allowed on a form (no more than five)
* Don’t try to come up with five accomplishments for AARs that only cover part of a performance appraisal cycle; some are likely to look trivial
* Write in the first-person and use fully-formed statements
* Briefly capture your significant contributions and accomplishments, conveying, when appropriate a sense of the complexity and challenge
* Describe what you did, in addition to how you advanced a team, unit, or Agency objective, or contributed to the effective functioning of an operating unit
* If you have one, include an accomplishment that highlights a technical contribution
* Enter end dates for out-of-cycle AARs so that ePerformance can generate automated reminders (all reminders are based on either the default or the manually entered end date)
* Discuss accomplishments and contributions that might be candidates for the AAR each quarter in your quarterly conversations

**Example Accomplishments\***

**Example 1:** For an Executive Officer who was expected to review new security requirements and provide information to the learning management team that would inform updates to a security training module for FSOs:

***Ineffective:***I believe I was an exceptional performer this year. I supported everyone on the team and made important updates to our security practices that will ensure USAID maintains its overall security requirements.  I did an amazing job and everyone said my teamwork skills were the best they’ve ever seen. (49 words)

* This example is vague about how the employee supported the team. It does identify that the work impacts the agency’s ability to meet overall security requirements, but does not describe what the employee did. It is also evaluative, offering an opinion about how *well* the employee did the work (i.e., amazing and exceptional), even referencing the perceptions of others. The AAR should not be used to describe how well you performed, but rather what you did and why it was important. Furthermore, the AAR should not be used to discuss specific skills in the Skills Framework; the Promotion Input Form is where FSOs who are eligible for promotion will describe how they demonstrated core skills and/or subskills.

***Effective:*** I discovered that our security training modules were seriously out of date and took responsibility for identifying and incorporating needed changes. This involved extensive research on cybersecurity challenges, researching and documenting updated security practices for various levels of threat at overseas Missions, and coordinating rewrites and reviews with security and training staff. I also developed infographics to make information memorable. Training now presents current USAID security requirements in a user-friendly format.  (71 words)

* This example provides context about the situation and more concrete examples of the employee’s actions and the outcome. It also effectively describes the initiative the employee exhibited and the coordination that was required to achieve the outcome.  It does all of this without exceeding the 75 word limit.

**Example 2:** For a Health Officer who was placed in the position of serving as an intermediary and advisor in a situation where multiple misunderstandings and disagreements between local officials and partners were jeopardizing important health programs in the region.

***Ineffective:***For the nutrition project, I reached out to multiple resources to address needs I anticipated so we could move forward. For vaccinations I raised specific questions, including: How can we make this program sustainable? What’s the impact of limiting clinic access?  This led to uncovering critical issues and discussions with numerous differing opinions but eventually resolving an impasse. For another project I met with stakeholders frequently because I saw unique aspects of the situation.  (74 words)

* While this example provides some specific details on actions taken by the employee it is ineffective for several reasons. First, the sentence about the nutrition project doesn’t add value - it describes an activity but not what that activity led to (move forward is too vague). For the vaccinations project, there are a lot of details but no description of what was accomplished. For the last project, the employee is comparing herself to her peers and this is not appropriate. Employees need to describe the situation, need, or challenge; what they did; and if it is not obvious, how what they did contributed to the accomplishment of a team or mission goal. Trying to cover too much ground (e.g., 3 projects) in one example makes it difficult for the reader to understand what was accomplished.

***Effective:***As a health project manager I resolved two issues that resulted in the successful completion of previously stalled negotiations. Local officials were blocking access to health clinics, jeopardizing our vaccination program. My questions surfaced an incorrect assumption that was creating resistance and appreciative inquiry techniques I used calmed emotions, created a respectful tone, and allowed all parties to be heard. This led to a compromise that opened the clinic and let vaccinations continue.   (73 words)

* The effective example is more focused and concise, opening with the accomplishment and the challenge, and then briefly describing two specific actions the FSO took that contributed to the positive outcome. It paints a clearer picture of what the employee did and why it was important.

## Effective Annual Review Conversations

**Logistics for Annual Review Conversations**

Annual review conversations should occur late in the fourth quarter or by April 30 at the very latest. The forms that must be completed or referenced during this last conversation of the quarterly Employee Performance and Development process include:

* the Quarterly Conversations Record
* the FS Skills Assessment and FS/SFS Skills Framework
* the Annual Accomplishment Record(s)
* the Annual Performance Evaluation form (the official rating of record)

Be sure to check the status of these forms in ePerformance and ensure that all are completed by the April 30 due date. Employees, as well as supervisors have a responsibility to see that these forms are completed on time.

**Effective Performance Conversations**

An annual review conversation is an opportunity to recognize your contributions during the past year, discuss development opportunities, and engage in a forward-looking discussion about what you should aim to contribute in the next year. If done right, you will leave this conversation feeling motivated about the year ahead. Make sure your conversation is:

* *An open dialogue* – invite honest and direct discussion; avoid debates or one-sided explanations where you focus on describing why your perspective is correct

**Dialogue** = collaborative; two or more work together toward common understanding

**Debate** = oppositional; two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong

* *Evidence-based* – focus on facts; give examples; do not put too much emphasis on one-off examples of highly effective or ineffective performance
* *Forward-looking* – discuss improvements or development needs in terms of future impact
* *Not a surprise* – remember that you should have regular conversations with your supervisor to discuss accomplishments and performance issues. Your supervisor should not raise an ongoing or systemic performance issue for the first time in an end-of-year review conversation unless they learn about it for the first time in the last quarter, nor should you be raising challenges you are having accomplishing your work for the first time in an end-of-year review conversation.

**Prepare for the Conversation**

Don’t be a passive participant in the conversation. To have an effective dialogue, come prepared to be engaged in a discussion about how you view your performance and walk in with an open-mind about what your supervisor will share with you during the conversation. While your preparation will include looking back over the past year at your accomplishments and development areas, you should also think about how you would like to build on your strengths and improve in the following year based on where you are now.

Ask yourself the following questions as you reflect and prepare for your performance conversation:

1. What have I accomplished against my performance objectives this year? How did I demonstrate USAID’s core values? Is there anything outside of what was documented that I have achieved?

* Why were these contributions important?
* How was I able to accomplish this?
* What skills do I possess that contributed to my success?

1. What support did I receive from my supervisor or others in performing my work?

* What support will I continue to need going forward?
* What support do I think is no longer critical?

1. What obstacles did I encounter, and did I overcome them effectively?

* What lessons did I learn from dealing with these challenges?
* How will those experiences help me be successful in the future?

1. What would I have done differently, or where can I improve?

* What is one thing I will do differently going forward to have a positive impact?

1. Who can I ask for feedback on my performance to help supplement my supervisor’s review?
2. What areas do I want to ask my supervisor for feedback on during the conversation?

**Remember: This is an opportunity for you to discuss your performance**

Your supervisor may ask you to self-rate your skill proficiency levels using the FS/SFS Skills Assessment before you meet with him/her. This can be a helpful way to start off the annual review conversation and will help your supervisor frame the feedback he/she has for you. Each of the three possible ratings can provide guidance for the development and career portion of the Annual Review Conversation. For example, “Improve/Grow” may necessitate a discussion on what resources are available to help you improve that skill. On the other hand, “Coach/Mentor” may mean it is time to discuss how you can leverage this strength to benefit your career or the team.

You may want to review some of the tip sheets related to *Ongoing Coaching and Feedback* to help you prepare for the discussion. Tip sheets in this Guidebook that may be especially helpful with respect to soliciting and responding to feedback include Seeking Feedback and Accepting Feedback.



**Sample Annual Review Conversation Dialogue**

A sample dialogue is provided on the next few pages as an illustration of what can be conveyed in an annual review conversation following this structure. It is not expected that every conversation will follow the script through each phase. Every supervisor-employee relationship is different and some topics will be covered in more or less depth, or may not be discussed at all in the end-of-year conversation if they are addressed regularly throughout the year.

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| 1. **Set the Stage for Two-Way Dialogue and Describe the Purpose** | | |
| **Specific Suggestions** | **Sample Leader Contributions** | **Sample Employee Contributions** |
| **Both parties discuss what they would like to achieve in the meeting** | *I would like to be sure that we discuss…*  *Is there anything else you would like to cover?* | *It would be really beneficial to me if we could also talk about….* |
| **Both engage in a way that allows this to be a two-way dialogue** | *It’s important to me that this is a dialogue, and not a monologue. I’m interested in your input.* | *I appreciate the chance to have an open discussion; I’m interested in your perspective and input as well.* |

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| 1. **Affirmative Feedback and Acknowledgement (looking back)** | | |
| **Specific Suggestions** | **Sample Leader Contributions** | **Sample Employee Contributions** |
| **Acknowledge what went well, what was accomplished, and how individual accomplished furthered larger goals.** | *Our work unit/team had some good successes this year. In particular, I’m proud of…*  *You contributed to our overall success by…* | *Yes, I think we’ve had some great successes. Thank you for your support on… in particular.* |
| **Discuss strengths and when and where exceptional skills were required and demonstrated.** | *This year, I’ve noticed that you:*   * *Consistently… [provide example such as “demonstrated your attention to detail by…”]* * *produced Y deliverable [describe quantity, quality, timeliness]*   *I really appreciate what you have done. This has contributed to our success by…*  *What are you particularly proud of?*  *What do you think contributed to your success in these areas?* | *Thank you. There are a couple of things I’ve accomplished that I’m particularly happy about…*   * *I think I upped my skill level in X area…* * *I tried to X and it seemed to be very successful* * *I produced Y deliverable [describe quantity, quality, timeliness]*   *I worked hard to…*  *Part of my success was due to …* |
| 1. **Specific Observations and Feedback (looking back)** | | |
| **Specific Suggestions** | **Sample Leader Contributions** | **Sample Employee Contributions** |
| **Share what you believe to be opportunities for development or improvement.**  **Share concrete examples of either project deliverables or behaviors where there is room for improvement.** | *As we have discussed before, one of the other things I’ve noticed over the last year is that you have*   * *consistently [behavior]… which resulted in [performance outcome]…*   + *Example 1*   + *Example 2* * *completed [deliverable] which produced Y [describe quantity, quality, timeliness]*   + *Example 1*   + *Example 2* | *I would really appreciate your feedback about…*   * *Project deliverables you think I have an opportunity to improve upon* * *Particular skills you think you I could strengthen*   *What about this aspect of my work…?* |
| **Discuss progress made since you last addressed the issue or opportunity**  **\*\* If you need to further explore a performance issue, review the conversation topics highlighted on the next few rows\*\*** | *After our last conversation about this,*   * *I have observed you [behavior]… and this has resulted in*    + *Improvements in X area*   + *A few remaining areas for improvement, including…* * *I have not seen changes in your behavior, which has resulted in…* | *Based on our last discussion, I have tried to…*   * + *Example 1*   + *Example 2*   *I think I’ve made improvements/progress by…*  *I’m still struggling with…* |
| **Ask open-ended questions to check your understanding** | *[How, what, why questions]*  *How do you see this?*  *What are your thoughts on this?*  *Why do you think this might be happening?* | *[How, what, why questions]*  *How do you see this?*  *What are your thoughts on this?*  *Why do you think this might be happening?* |
| **Ask open-ended questions to try and gather more information to help mutual problem solving and diagnosis of root causes** | *What might be an example of that?*  *When you say \_\_\_ what do you mean?*  *In what way?*  *What other ideas do you have on this?*  *What do you think could be done about it?*  *What worries you the most about it?*  *What do you consider the most troublesome aspect?*  *How would you describe it?* | *What might be an example of that?*  *When you say \_\_\_ what do you mean?*  *In what way?*  *What other ideas do you have on this?*  *What do you think could be done about it?*  *What worries you the most about it?*  *What do you consider the most troublesome aspect?*  *How would you describe it?* |
| **Engage in active listening** | *What I heard you say is…*  *It sounds like to me…*  *Let me make sure I understand what you said/how you feel…*  *If I heard you correctly…* | *What I heard you say is…*  *It sounds like to me…*  *Let me make sure I understand what you said/how you feel…*  *If I heard you correctly…* |
| **Own your own contributions to any issues** | *I recognize that I had a role in that… I am sorry for making that more difficult.* | *I recognize I had a role in that… I’m sorry for making that more difficult.* |
| **Provide initial suggestions for how to work on improving (*forward looking*)** | *Based on what we discussed, I think it would be beneficial for you if we…*  *Let’s look for opportunities for you to… in order to gain additional experience with…*  *How else can I help?* | *What would you suggest to help me improve on X?*  *Do you think it would be helpful if I… ?*  *I would really appreciate it if you could…* |

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| 1. **Future-focused Framing (forward looking)** | | | | |
| **Specific Suggestions** | | **Sample Leader Contributions** | **Sample Employee Contributions** | |
| **Discuss work unit/team goals for the next year** | | *Based on what we know now, our major goals/deliverables for the coming year will be…*  *The things that will make this challenging include…* | *What do you see as our key priorities and goals for the next year?*  *What challenges do you anticipate?*  *How do you think [X] will factor in to these goals?* | |
| **Discuss how either projects or the employee’s strengths can contribute to meeting the future goals** | | *In considering how you and your contributions factor in…*   * *I see your work (X project) as linking to these priorities and goals through…* * *I think your strengths in X will be beneficial for us achieving Y* | *How do you see my skillsets being leveraged to achieve our goals?* | |
| **Solicit observations regarding opportunities for development or improvement** | | *Are there any…*   * *Project deliverables you think you have an opportunity to improve upon?* * *Particular skillsets you would like to strengthen?* | *In terms of deliverables, I think my greatest opportunity to improve may be X. I say this because…*  *I would really like to contribute to… by working on X.*  *I appreciate your thoughts on this as well.* | |
| 1. **Next Steps and Mutual Accountabilities (forward looking)** | | | | |
| **Specific Suggestions** | **Sample Leader Contributions** | | | **Sample Employee Contributions** |
| **Feedback for the supervisor** | *Do you have any feedback for me about how I can better support your success?*  *Are there any instances where it would help for me to communicate in a different way?* | | | *Thank you for asking. It would really help me if you could…*  *I would appreciate specific feedback about…*  *I am concerned about X, and would appreciate it if you would…* |
| **Express positive outlook for next year** | *I think this was a really helpful discussion for framing what we should focus on next year.*  *Thank you again for all of your contributions. Your skillsets will be important factors in our success next year as well.* | | | *Yes, this was helpful for thinking through how I can best contribute next year.* |
| **Discuss next steps for the performance cycle** | *Each of us should take some time to reflect on what we’ve discussed and begin planning for next year’s performance objectives and development plan.*  *Let’s put a time on the calendar for setting your performance objectives next.* | | | *Sounds good. I will reach out to set a date and begin drafting performance objectives based on what we discussed today.* |
| **Close the conversation** | *Thank you for taking the time to discuss. I am really looking forward to your contributions this year.*  *I hope you will reach out if you need to clarify anything or need additional support.* | | | *Thank you for taking the time to discuss today.*  *I appreciate your guidance and support.* |

## After the Annual Review Conversation

**Reflect**

After the annual review conversation, take a little time to reflect on the conversation with your supervisor.

* What did you learn about your supervisor’s perspective on your strengths? On your weaknesses?
* What do you think you should be most proud of about your performance in the last year?
* What are you most excited about for the coming year?
* What steps or actions did you agree to take? How will you hold yourself accountable for these?
* What feedback did you receive that you can incorporate into your daily work? How will you do this?
* What key milestones or markers will indicate that you are growing and developing next year?
* How should your ILTP change in order to reflect what knowledge and skills you want to focus on in the next year?

**Plan**

Begin planning for next year by:

* Thinking about your performance objectives and development activities for next year. (See tools and tips related to setting objectives and planning for development.)
  + [Preparing for the Annual Expectation Setting and Planning Conversation](#_26in1rg)
  + [Tips for Writing Meaningful Expectations](#_3j2qqm3)
  + [GAPS Model](#_1ci93xb)
  + [Identifying Developmental Areas](#_3whwml4)
* Mark time on your calendar to draft your objectives (with input from your supervisor as needed) and draft your ILTP plan.
* Request an objective-setting meeting with your supervisor so it is scheduled in advance of the deadline for submitting objectives.

# Appendix

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Foreign Service Skills Assessment

<https://www.usaid.gov/forms/aid-461-3>

Foreign Service/Senior Foreign Service Skills Framework

<https://pages.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/fs-sfs_skills_framework-461mad_05-18.pdf>

Quarterly Conversation Record for Employees and Supervisors

<https://www.usaid.gov/forms/aid-461-4>

Foreign Service Annual Performance Evaluation Form

*(This form is the official rating of record; only FSOs will satisfactory ratings are allowed to compete for promotion)*

<https://www.usaid.gov/forms/aid-461-1>

Annual Accomplishment Record

*(This form will go to the Promotion Board when the employee is eligible for promotion)*

<https://www.usaid.gov/forms/aid-461-5>