



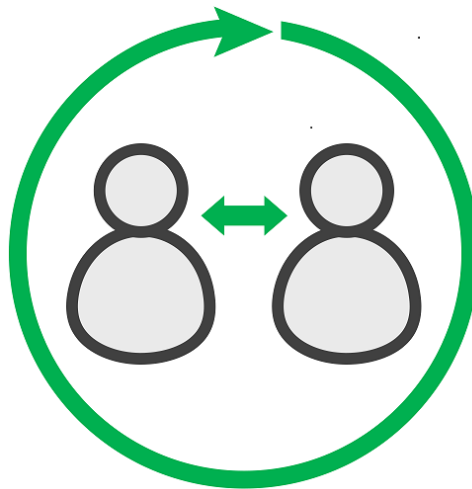
**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

# USAID EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS:

## GUIDEBOOK FOR SUPERVISORS

A practical guide for supervisors to implement and succeed with day-to-day performance management

MAY 2018



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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 roles in support of the Agency mission.

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

1. Replaces the focus on documenting performance with a focus on meaningful conversations about 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

Additionally, in the process of rethinking the performance management process it was necessary to rethink the promotion process because the two processes, each with very different goals, were inextricably linked by the Annual Evaluation Form (AEF). 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 a supervisor, be effective in upholding your performance and development responsibilities and facilitating effective, high-quality performance from your employees.

# 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](#) 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 conduct performance and development discussions and provide ongoing coaching and feedback throughout the year. ***Please note that employees 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](#)

## Set Expectations and Plan for Development

- [Preparing for the Annual Expectation Setting and Planning Conversation](#)
- [Tips for Writing Meaningful Expectations](#)
- [Clarifying Expectations](#)
- [Identifying and Providing Stretch Assignments](#)

## Engage in Ongoing Coaching & Feedback

- [Quarterly Conversations](#)
- [Overview of Coaching](#)
- [Coaching Skills Self-Assessment](#)
- [Communicating Expectations and Assignments](#)
- [Providing Informal Feedback](#)
- [Effective Recognition Practices](#)
- [Constructive Feedback Conversations](#)
- [Soliciting 360 Degree Feedback](#)
- [Observing Behavior and Diagnosing Performance Challenges](#)

## Review Performance

- [Performance Evaluations](#)
- [Performance Ratings](#)
- [Effective Annual Review Conversations](#)
- [After the Annual Review Conversation](#)

# Snapshot of the Employee Performance and Development Process

	1. Set Expectations & Plan for Development	2. Engage in Ongoing Coaching & Feedback	3. Review Performance
Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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</li> <li>• Reflect on past performance and career aspirations; identify development areas that you want to focus on in the next year</li> <li>• Draft 1 developmental objective and 2 work objectives for review with supervisor in the Quarterly Conversation Record</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As part of ongoing work, seek clarification of expectations and request feedback</li> <li>• Seek out development opportunities where appropriate throughout the year</li> <li>• Proactively offer feedback to your supervisor and your peers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflect on accomplishments throughout the year and areas for improvement</li> <li>• Finalize the Quarterly Conversation Record; complete Annual Accomplishment Record (AAR) to document up to 5 of your significant contributions/accomplishments</li> <li>• Generate ideas for how to continue your development and progress over the next year</li> </ul>
Dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss work unit priorities and how the employee's work contributes to the Agency's mission</li> <li>• Revise and finalize work objectives</li> <li>• Ensure a clear understanding of expectations and work objectives</li> <li>• Discuss career aspirations, development needs for advancement, and performance improvement areas</li> <li>• Determine appropriate training or developmental opportunities and document in a skill development objective and the Individual Learning and Training Plan (ILTP)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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</li> <li>• 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)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss performance progress, contributions and accomplishments related to objectives and expectations, and how the employee can build on these accomplishments in the following year</li> <li>• Discuss additional resources or support needed by the employee to overcome challenges or meet performance expectations</li> </ul>
Supervisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate Agency and work unit priorities</li> <li>• Think through the employee's most important work activities and the most important outcomes the employee will need to achieve in the coming year</li> <li>• Identify areas for improvement in employee's current role</li> <li>• 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</li> <li>• Document work objectives in the Quarterly Conversation Record</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As part of ongoing work, reinforce and clarify expectations and provide ongoing coaching and feedback (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly)</li> <li>• Reflect on employee's progress and collect feedback from others to inform your feedback and coaching, as needed</li> <li>• Provide stretch assignments and development opportunities where appropriate</li> <li>• Hold at least one check-in with the employee each quarter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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</li> <li>• 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</li> <li>• 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</li> </ul>

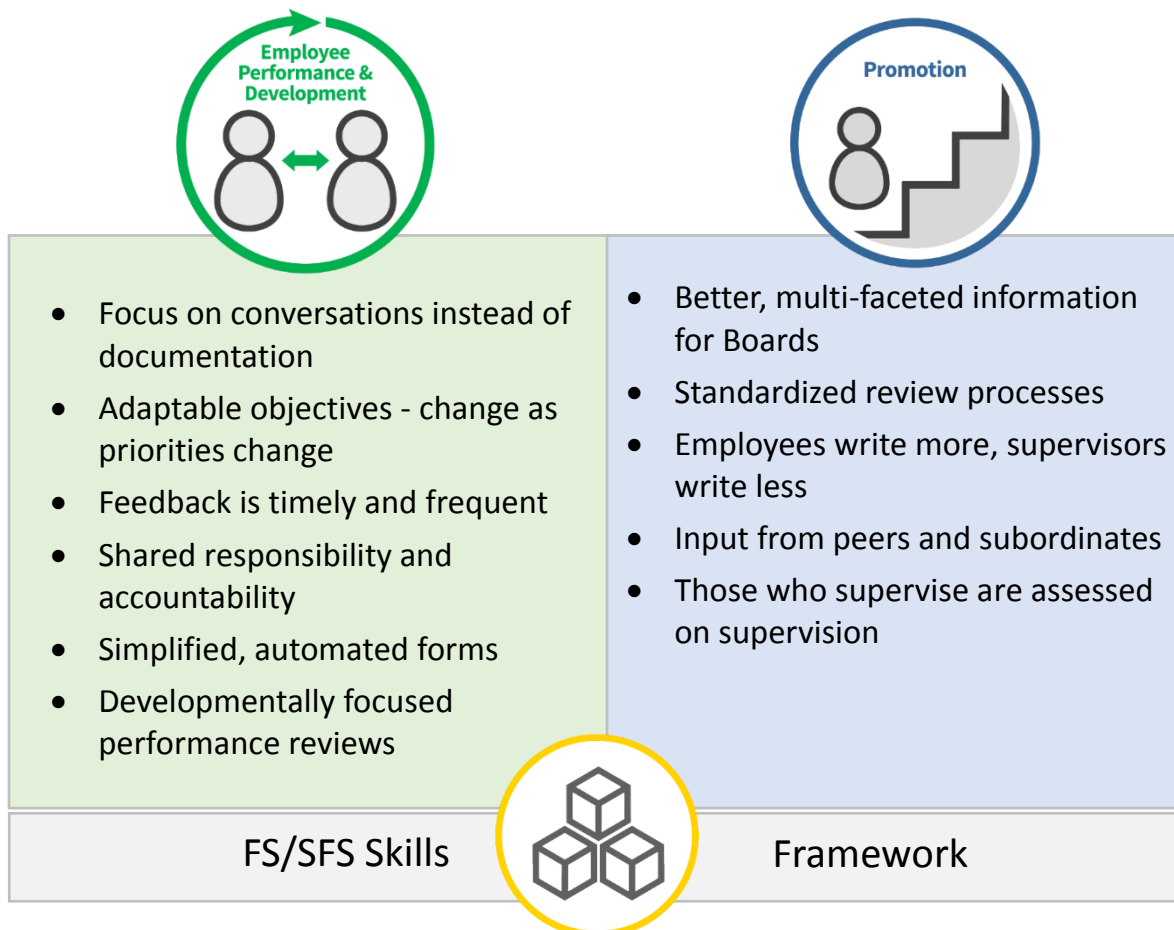
# Employee Performance and Development

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 underperforming employees accountable for meeting the demands of their jobs and developing the skills needed for success in the Foreign Service. 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 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, negotiations, 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 on what is involved.

## Vision for the Two Processes



# Roles and Responsibilities

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
- ✓ 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
- ✓ 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. 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 to provide compliance reports to senior managers for monitoring and follow-up.



## 1. Set Expectations & 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.*

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### 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.

#### USAID Core Values

Passion for Mission  
Excellence  
Integrity  
Respect  
Empowerment  
Inclusion  
Commitment to Learning

#### Expectations

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

#### FS/SFS Skills Framework

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

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 an employee moves to a new assignment, the supervisor and employee meet to:
  - a. Discuss the goals of the Operating Unit, the employee's role in supporting the Operating Unit, immediate or upcoming priorities, and context and constraints.
  - b. Reflect on the employee's strengths and development areas and identify one or more areas the employee will focus on building or enhancing throughout the performance cycle.
  - c. Articulate and clarify work objectives and at least one skill development objective.
  - d. Discuss shorter-term priorities, project-specific requirements, or other expectations for the first quarter of the year.

#### Key Idea

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



2. Using the [Quarterly Conversation Record](#) (QCR) in ePerformance:

- a. 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.
- b. 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.
- c. Note any challenges, risks, opportunities, resource issues, etc. that may impact progress and need to stay on the employee's and supervisor's radar.

**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

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 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 each employee to establish objectives, review expectations for how work will be accomplished, and develop a plan for supporting the employee's 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 the employee's work supports work unit and higher level goals,
- think through the employee's 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 the employee's assignment,
- review 360 feedback and the most recent Skills Assessment, if available, plus any other relevant input on the employee's performance from the previous cycle, such as Multisource Ratings,
- reflect on the employee's areas of strength and identify areas that the employee needs to improve or build on during the performance cycle,
- identify development opportunities/on-the-job experiences that will help the employee improve in his or her current role and/or work toward promotion,
- consider the resources that the employee will need to be successful and the support you can provide, and
- create an agenda for your discussion.

## Materials to Bring to the Conversation

- **FS/SFS Skills Framework** – helpful reference for articulating how the work should be accomplished and providing specific behavioral examples of skill requirements at the employee's grade level (or at the next level if considering promotion)
- **Notes on the employee's key activities, projects, and priorities** – what are the most important short-term and long-term things the employee needs to accomplish while he or she is in this position
- **Position description** – if a position description is available it may be useful when discussing general or day-to-day responsibilities of the job

### 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.*

- **Ideas for training, stretch assignments, or other skill development opportunities** – identify activities that will help employees who are “stuck” and need suggestions for improving skill areas or preparing for promotion
- **Agenda** – an agenda will ensure that you cover all of the topics with your employee

### Timeframe for the Conversation

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 an FSO arrives at a new post, ideally within the first 30 days.

#### 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.

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 employees or supervisors are starting a new assignment, 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 the employee brings to the job, and the expectations you have as a 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 Expectation Setting and Planning Conversation Agenda

It is important to note that unless employees are starting a new assignment or getting tasked with additional and unfamiliar projects or responsibilities, employees will be an important source of information about the status and challenges of their work and what might constitute conservative, realistic, or aspirational objectives. Supervisors need to be prepared to ask questions that stimulate reflection and a productive exchange of ideas that will lead to objectives that reflect the reality of the situation, as well as the higher level goals of the Mission or Agency.

Employees need to be prepared to do exactly the same thing – ask questions that foster a deeper shared understanding of goals, responsibilities, opportunities, and constraints. Throughout the Guidebook there are many examples of open-ended questions that are useful starting points for Quarterly Conversations. It is often helpful to select a few good questions in advance and include them in your notes.

A sample agenda for an expectation setting conversation is outlined below, followed by a sample conversation.

**1. Purpose**

- *Briefly highlight the purpose of the conversation – to discuss the employee’s skill development and work objectives, expectations for the coming year, how to be successful in accomplishing the objectives, and what you can do as a supervisor to support the employee in the coming year.*

**2. Accomplishments and Skill Development Areas**

- *Briefly reflect on the strengths and skill development areas discussed in the annual review so you have a shared perspective on the foundation for next year’s objectives and activities.*

**3. USAID Core Values, FS/SFS Skills Framework, and Contributions to the Agency**

- *Review the higher level goals of the team, mission or Agency, and ensure that the employee is aware of any new directives or priorities. Make sure the employee understands the implications of those goals and priorities for his or her own work and how his or her work impacts the work of others and the achievement of higher level goals and objectives.*
- *Depending on each employee’s tenure<sup>1</sup> and experience, you might also want to:*
  - *Provide a high-level review of the USAID core values and how they can be reflected or challenged in tough decisions or day-to-day interactions with colleagues, partners, local officials, or beneficiaries.*
  - *Use the FS/SFS Skills Framework to outline the skills and subskills (and associated proficiency levels) most critical for the employee’s assignment.*

**Key Point**

The questions you ask yourself and your employee not only give you important information, your questions also set an example; in asking thoughtful questions you are modeling something employees should be doing too!

**4. Objectives, Expectations, and Priorities**

- *Review draft objectives (skill development and work objectives) and discuss why these objectives are important to focus on in the coming year.*
- *Discuss projects and activities that are priorities for the next few months (e.g., first quarter) and share ideas and strategies for how to get things done, leverage resources, manage risks and develop opportunities.*
- *If needed, help the employee prioritize his/her objectives and the shorter-term activities and expectations so he or she knows where to spend the most time or focus his or her effort.*

**5. Individual Learning and Skill Development**

- *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.*

**6. Resources for Success**

- *Ask for feedback from the employee about how you can help the employee succeed and grow.*
- *Outline what resources you think are important for the employee to succeed and how you will support the employee.*

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<sup>1</sup> Note that tenure nomination comes with very specific requirements that a supervisor/employee must account for in order for the employee to qualify for tenure. See ADS 414 for tenure requirements and guidance.

## 7. Next Steps

- *Share your commitment to maintaining open, honest communication and your willingness to give and receive feedback.*
- *If you have specific ways you prefer to work or communicate (e.g., open door - stop by anytime vs preferred uninterrupted time, or email vs phone calls) share this information and ask about their preferred working style*
- *Ask the employee to commit to seeking feedback and letting you know when they need additional support or guidance.*

### 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 or spend less time addressing others. Consider important factors (e.g., whether the employee is new to his or her position, whether he or she is ready for more challenge or promotion, whether he or she is acting in a higher graded position) in tailoring your approach with each employee and determining the best questions to ask.

1. Set the Stage for Two-Way Dialogue and Describe the Purpose		
Specific Suggestions	Sample Supervisor Contributions	Sample Employee Contributions
<b>Express appreciation for meeting and the importance of the Employee Performance &amp; Development process</b>	<i>Thanks for taking the time to meet...</i>  <i>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.</i>  <i>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.</i>  <i>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.</i>	<i>Thank you for taking the time to meet.</i>  <i>Can you explain a little more about our approach to performance and development?</i>

<p><b>Discuss the purpose of the meeting and what each person wants to achieve</b></p>	<p><i>The purpose of this meeting is to discuss expectations and plan for your continued growth and development in the next year.</i></p> <p><i>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.</i></p> <p><i>In addition, we'll discuss priorities and expectations for the work you'll be doing in the near term.</i></p> <p><i>I would like to be sure that we discuss...</i></p> <p><i>Is there anything else you'd like to cover?</i></p>	<p><i>It would be really beneficial to me and my performance going forward if we could also talk about two things...</i></p> <p><i>I appreciate having this chance to connect and make sure that we are on the same page moving forward.</i></p>
<p><b>Make clear that this is a two-way dialogue</b></p>	<p><i>It's important to me that this is a dialogue, and not a monologue. I'm interested in your input.</i></p>	<p><i>I appreciate the chance to have an open discussion; I'm interested in your perspective and input as well.</i></p>

2. Reflect on Accomplishments and Skill Development Areas		
Specific Suggestions	Sample Supervisor Contributions	Sample Employee Contributions
<p><b>Briefly review the strengths and development areas discussed in the annual review conversation, including areas to develop moving forward.</b></p>	<p><i>Strengths:</i></p> <p><i>As we discussed before, you have:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>- consistently demonstrated X behavior... [provide example such as "demonstrated your attention to detail by..."]</i></li> <li><i>- produced Y deliverable [describe quantity, quality, timeliness]</i></li> </ul> <p><i>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.</i></p> <p><i>Development Areas:</i></p> <p><i>Areas to focus on developing in the coming year are related to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>- [behavior] X... [provide a performance example]</i></li> <li><i>- [deliverable] Y [describe quantity, quality, timeliness]</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Improving in these areas will... [help you perform better in your current role]... [help prepare you for a future role]</i></p>	<p><i>Strengths:</i></p> <p><i>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.</i></p> <p><i>Development Areas:</i></p> <p><i>I would really appreciate the opportunity to work on these skills.</i></p> <p><i>I am hoping to identify some good opportunities to develop these skills and would appreciate your input on how to do that.</i></p>

### 3. USAID Core Values, FS/SFS Skills Framework, and Contributions to the Agency

Specific Suggestions	Sample Supervisor Contributions	Sample Employee Contributions
<b>Review the USAID core values and FS/SFS Skills Framework</b>	<p><i>As you know, upholding our values is extremely important to effectively carrying out our mission.</i></p> <p><i>I've seen you demonstrate these values in your daily work by...</i></p> <p><i>How do you see our values playing a role in how you conduct your work?</i></p> <p><i>Here are a few subskills that I think are critical to your work:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>[Subskill example/definition]</i></li> <li>- <i>In your position and grade, doing this well looks like...</i></li> <li>- <i>I'd like to see you consistently do this by...</i></li> </ul>	<p><i>I agree the values are important because...</i></p> <p><i>In my daily work I strive to...</i></p> <p><i>What about skills and subskills?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Which subskills do you think are most critical in my position?</i></li> <li>- <i>What is the best way for me to demonstrate this on the job?</i></li> </ul>
<b>Highlight how the employee contributes to the overall success of the work unit and to USAID's mission</b>	<p><i>Our work unit's priorities and goals for the next year include...</i></p> <p><i>I see your work linked to these priorities and goals through...</i></p> <p><i>Your contributions impact X, which results in greater overall performance by...</i></p>	<p><i>What do you see as our work unit's key priorities and goals for the next year?</i></p> <p><i>How do you see my work impacting those priorities and goals?</i></p>

### 4. Objectives, Expectations, and Priorities

Specific Suggestions	Sample Supervisor Contributions	Sample Employee Contributions
<b>Discuss each draft objective</b>	<p><i>[If you have asked the employee to draft work objectives before the meeting...] Let's take a look at the objectives you drafted and flesh them out before finalizing them.</i></p> <p><i>Here are what I consider to be important priorities for your work in the next year...</i></p> <p><i>Compared to last year, the big changes are...</i></p> <p><i>What do you think are the most important deliverables/outcomes you can contribute this year?</i></p> <p><i>Let's talk about the draft objectives...</i></p> <p><i>For each objective:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Is the requirement and the desired outcome clear?</i></li> <li>- <i>Do you think this is an appropriate method for measuring this objective?</i></li> <li>- <i>What else should we consider?</i></li> </ul>	<p><i>[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?</i></p> <p><i>What do you see as the highest priority for my work in the coming year?</i></p> <p><i>What from last year's objectives should stay the same?</i></p> <p><i>What are the major changes you see needed for the coming year?</i></p> <p><i>For each objective:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Could you explain what you mean by...?</i></li> <li>- <i>I think it would also be important to identify...</i></li> <li>- <i>Do you think I will have the resources I need to do this successfully?</i></li> <li>- <i>How do you expect me to</i></li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Is this something you agree is important and will be committed to achieving?</i></li> <li>- <i>Which of the FS skills and subskills are required to perform the work reflected in the objective?</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Is there anything missing? Can I clarify anything about these objectives overall?</i></p>	<p><i>demonstrate the FS skills and subskills as I work on achieving this objective?</i></p> <p><i>I'm curious about...</i></p> <p><i>What about this aspect of my work...?</i></p> <p><i>[Summarize your understanding]... Is that accurate?</i></p>
<b>Confirm employee's commitment to achieving the objectives</b>	<p><i>How comfortable are you with this set of objectives?</i></p> <p><i>Are these objectives motivating and challenging enough for you to feel engaged?</i></p>	<p><i>I think these objectives are achievable, and I look forward to contributing to our success.</i></p> <p><i>I'd like to also consider X as a way to challenge myself.</i></p>

<b>5. Individual Learning and Skill Development</b>		
<b>Specific Suggestions</b>	<b>Sample Supervisor Contributions</b>	<b>Sample Employee Contributions</b>
<b>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</b>	<p><i>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?</i></p> <p><i>In terms of stretch assignments or tasks, I think it would stretch you to do...</i></p> <p><i>What training courses have you identified based on what you want to develop?</i></p> <p><i>I also think it would be helpful if you...</i></p> <p><i>Would you be interested in taking on X to see if it is something you enjoy?</i></p> <p><i>Let's make sure these ideas, and your skill development objective, are in your ILTP.</i></p>	<p><i>I'd be excited about an opportunity to...</i></p> <p><i>I think it would help me to take X courses to build my skills in Y.</i></p> <p><i>Do you think it would help me improve in X if I were able to work on Y?</i></p> <p><i>Here is what I have in my draft ILTP, can you confirm that these are things that will develop the areas we just discussed?</i></p>

<b>6. Resources for Success</b>		
<b>Specific Suggestions</b>	<b>Sample Supervisor Contributions</b>	<b>Sample Employee Contributions</b>
<b>Discuss specific ways the supervisor can help or support the employee</b>	<p><i>How can I help?</i></p> <p><i>From our conversation it sounds like one thing that might help is...</i></p>	<p><i>It would be really helpful if you could make sure that I receive X resources...</i></p> <p><i>Do you think it would be helpful to...?</i></p> <p><i>Can you put me in touch with...?</i></p>
<b>Feedback for the supervisor</b>	<p><i>Do you have any feedback for me about how I can better support your success?</i></p> <p><i>Are there any instances where it would help for me to communicate in a different way?</i></p>	<p><i>Thank you for asking. It would really help me if you could...</i></p> <p><i>I would appreciate specific feedback about...</i></p> <p><i>I am concerned about X, and would appreciate it if you would...</i></p>



7. Next Steps		
Specific Suggestions	Sample Supervisor Contributions	Sample Employee Contributions
Discuss communication going forward throughout the year	<p><i>As we move forward throughout the year, it is important that we maintain communication about progress on your objectives and day-to-day work.</i></p> <p><i>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></p> <p><i>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.</i></p>	<p><i>Thank you. I appreciate that.</i></p> <p><i>I will also seek feedback or let you know if I need additional support.</i></p>
Close the conversation	<p><i>Thank you for taking the time to discuss. I am really looking forward to your contributions this year.</i></p> <p><i>I hope you will reach out if you need to clarify anything or need additional support.</i></p>	<p><i>Thank you for taking the time to discuss today.</i></p> <p><i>I appreciate your guidance and support.</i></p>

# Tips for Writing Meaningful Expectations



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

- 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 have clarified what you really want the employee to do (e.g., How should the employee carry out the objective? What is the outcome of the objective?)**

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

- For example, if the employee will be representing USAID at financial meetings in Country X, you should make sure your employee is clear 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 the employee has while in those meetings.

## Key Point

Supervisors and employees should develop expectations and work 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

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

Questions Helpful in Clarifying Objectives	
<b>Service-oriented Activities</b>	
Reliability	Do you need to emphasize consistency of performance and dependability?
Responsiveness/Timeliness	How ready does the employee 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 you expect will stretch the employee's skill?
Access	Is it important for the employee 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)?
<b>Product-based Results</b>	
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 objective is written. In actuality, you and the employee are responsible for establishing two work objectives (or one or three or four if that is more appropriate given an employee's projects or work streams) and one skill development objective.
- 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:

Section 2 – Objectives
<b>Objectives:</b> 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.
<i>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.</i>

Section 3 – Quarterly Conversations	
Q1: April – June (Objectives & Expectation Setting Conversation)	Due NLT June 30
<b>Short-Term Priorities, Goals, Expectations</b> <i>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.</i>	<b>Notes on challenges, resources needed, etc.</b>
<b>Priorities:</b> Strengthen democratic political processes, support agricultural sector recovery.  <b>Work/project planning:</b> 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 draft with Washington and revise the framework in view of feedback received.	<p>Will have to use draft version of local needs assessment to start – follow-up to get final once completed.</p> <p>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</p>

**For a Health Officer Role:**

Section 2 – Objectives
<p><b>Objectives:</b> 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.</p>
<p>Team's Goal/Objective: Reduce spread of HIV/AIDS epidemic in Country X by 20%.</p> <p>Your role: Strategically engage traditional leaders and identify innovative approaches to ensure country buy-in and accelerated progress towards HIV/AIDS epidemic control.</p>

Section 3 – Quarterly Conversations	
Q1: April – June (Objectives & Expectation Setting Conversation)	Due NLT June 30
<p><b>Short-Term Priorities, Goals, Expectations</b>  <i>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.</i></p>	<p><b>Notes on challenges, resources needed, etc.</b></p>
<p><b>Quarterly targets:</b>            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.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>

\* 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.

**For Technical Officer Role:**

Section 2 – Objectives
<b>Objectives:</b> 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.

Section 3 – Quarterly Conversations	
Q1: April – June (Objectives & Expectation Setting Conversation)	Due NLT June 30
<b>Short-Term Priorities, Goals, Expectations</b> <i>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.</i>	<b>Notes on challenges, resources needed, etc.</b>
<p><b>Priorities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Forge new alliances between USAID and the private sector to generate additional social sector investment,</li> <li>- Leverage USAID assistance for health and education,</li> <li>- Put the national family planning association, GOFAM, on a solid footing of good governance.</li> </ul> <p><b>Work Plan:</b></p> <p>Q1 – Design an alliance-building program to secure private sector funding for GOFAM health and education services.</p> <p>Q2 – Initiate new program toward goal of raising \$5 million by year end.</p> <p>Q3 – Support GOFAM agreement with terms and cooperative agreement leading toward complete self-financing.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>Note: \$5M is aspirational; will need reality checks as we go along, especially with anticipated currency fluctuations.</p>

\* 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:**

Section 2 – Objectives
<b>Objectives:</b> 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.

Section 3 – Quarterly Conversations	
Q1: April – June (Objectives & Expectation Setting Conversation)	Due NLT June 30
<b>Short-Term Priorities, Goals, Expectations</b> <i>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.</i>	<b>Notes on challenges, resources needed, etc.</b>
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

# Clarifying Expectations

Clarifying what is expected from your employees is not a once per year activity – clearly describing critical requirements and asking your employees what specific tasks or actions they expect to spend time on in order to reach a goal is an important part of developing a shared understanding of expectations and priorities.

During quarterly check-ins or anytime priorities shift you need to redirect your employees, make it a habit to check assumptions and recap key points and decisions; you may need to adjust or redirect.

If *your* manager were to ask your employees what is expected of them, their answers to the following questions should be pretty close to yours.

1. **What are the major tasks that need to be completed to get the most important objectives accomplished?**
2. **Where did the need or request come from? Who is the most important stakeholder, or who is the team or your boss or the Mission Director accountable to for this?**
3. **What's the background or context for the assignment or objective? Have we tried and failed before? Tried and succeeded? Do we have SOP or lessons learned?**
4. **Who on the team is responsible for what? Who might be a resource for what?**
5. **What is the totally successful outcome? What is the 80% solution if 100% isn't possible? What are the acceptable and unacceptable quantity, quality, and timeliness trade-offs?**
6. **What are the major risks? At what point does the employee need to check-in, course correct, alert management to an unintended consequence or risk that needs to be managed?**
7. **What's the skill or habit the employees is working on developing this quarter or this year?**



# Identifying and Providing Stretch Assignments



## Stretch Assignments Defined

Stretch assignments foster employees' growth by giving them a deliberate opportunity to learn on the job rather than in a training course. Encourage employees to talk with you about whether they feel ready to take on more challenging assignments, either **within** their current position, or **beyond** their current position. Stretch assignments often:

- Go beyond an employee's job description and 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 of the employee's typical job requirements
- *Creating change* – Being responsible for facilitating some type of change in the work unit or Agency (e.g., change a business process, fix a problem)
- *High level of responsibility* – Increasing the amount of responsibility beyond what is typical for the employee (e.g., leading a high visibility project)
- *Working across boundaries* – Working with different partners or with people whom the employee has had limited interaction in the past (e.g., participating in 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

## Encourage Employees to Think Through Potential Stretch Assignments

Supervisors should enable employees to seek appropriate stretch assignments. Ask questions like these to open a discussion with them about experiences that are appropriate for their individual situation:

- ✓ *Do you feel ready to take on more challenge?*
- ✓ *Are you looking to develop skills further within your current position, or explore something outside of the responsibilities associated with your position?*
- ✓ *Have you spoken with peers or colleagues about their experiences in positions that you want to pursue? What information and advice did they offer you?*
- ✓ *What next steps do you plan to take to identify or capitalize on stretch assignments?*
- ✓ *How can I help you get the stretch assignments that you have identified?*

## Provide Opportunities for Employees

While you want to encourage your employees to be proactive, it is also important to look for and provide stretch assignments that you perceive would benefit your employees. Your experience and expertise combined with your knowledge of their skills and abilities makes you well-positioned to suggest opportunities that they may not think of. Here are a few tips for identifying good stretch assignments:

- Regularly assess the experiences needed for employees to develop important knowledge and skills.
  - Take time to determine each employee's strengths and weaknesses. Are they ready to stretch, or still mastering their existing assignments?
  - What types of activities or projects would test his or her skills?
  - Write your ideas down and return to your list the next time you have to make a project staffing decision or assign a new task.
- Make a deliberate effort to give employees tasks that stretch them outside their comfort zones when ready.
  - Don't always use your "go-to" person for a given type of work; people will generally rise to the occasion if you give them a chance.
  - Be willing to tolerate some mistakes – errors and small failures along the way are essential for learning.
  - Pair an employee with another more experienced team member as an initial step.



## 2. Engage in Ongoing Coaching & Feedback

*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

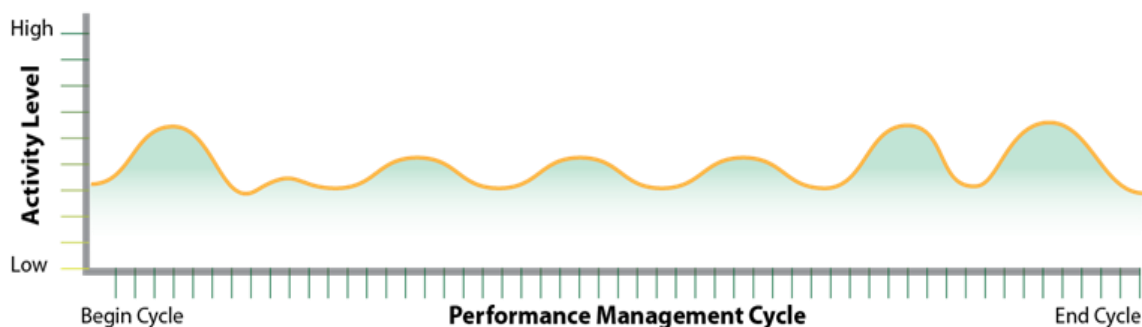
Traditional approaches to performance management, including USAID's old AEF system, require a planning session, a mid-year review (often delayed or neglected altogether), and a final performance review session. However, research shows that this approach is not only frustrating to supervisors and employees,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



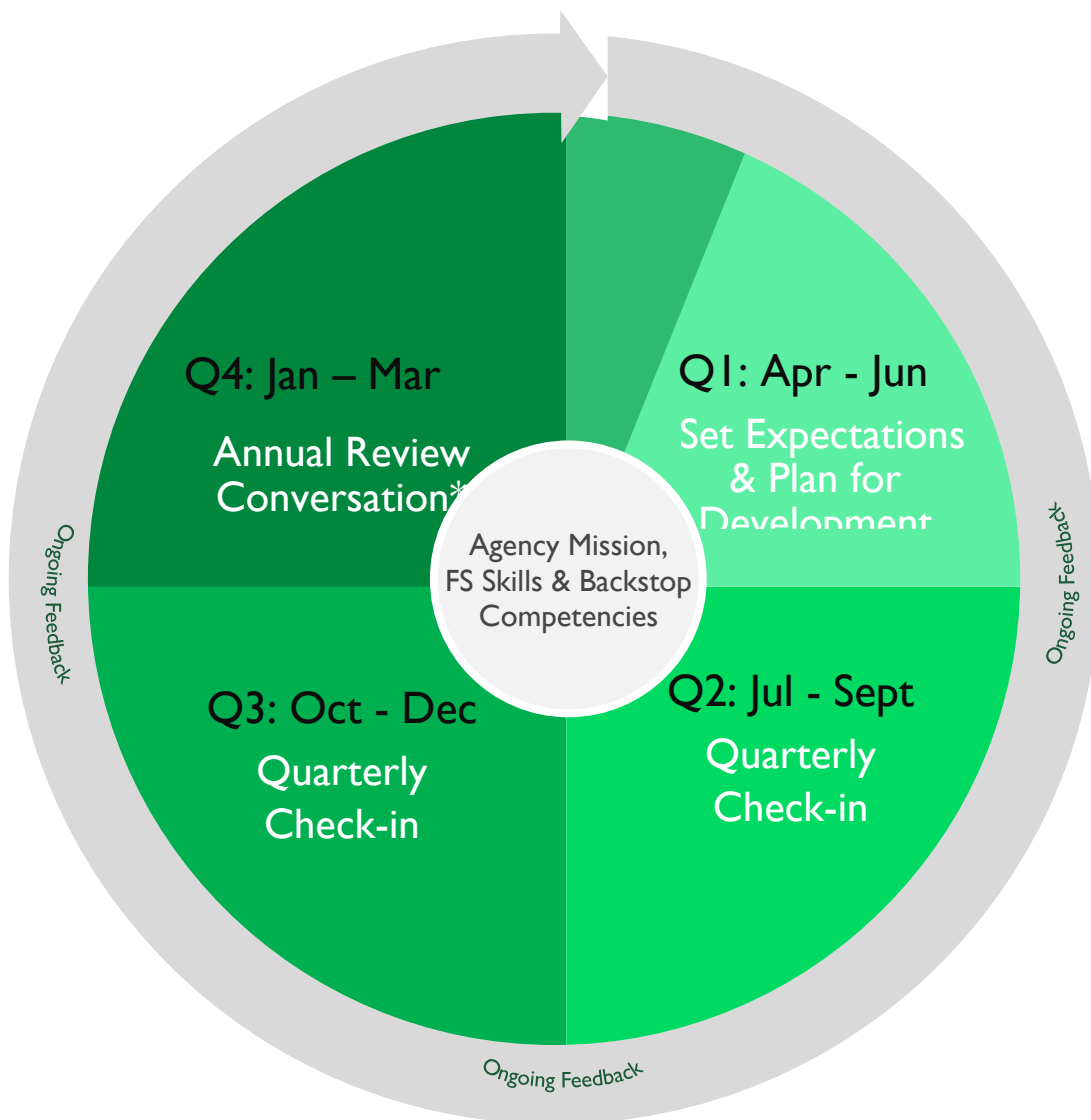
Corporate Leadership Council (2014). *Conducting Effective Performance Conversations: Six Imperatives for Driving Enterprise Contribution through Performance Discussions*. Corporate Executive Board.

# Quarterly Conversations



## 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 employee 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).



The quarterly conversations will be documented using the [Quarterly Conversation Record](#). 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 the employee's progress throughout the year. You are encouraged to use the space provided to create a record that you and the employee 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 an employee submits to the Promotion Boards when he or she is eligible for promotion. It is meant to be a resource used by the supervisor and employee to facilitate the EP&D process.

### ***Completing quarterly conversations***

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 the supervisor may have received or solicited
- 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

#### **Key Tip**

- Employees are encouraged to seek out and request feedback from others
- Asking for feedback first from your employees will make conversations more effective
- Requested feedback is more easily accepted; therefore, creating an environment where asking for feedback is the norm can assist in performance improvement

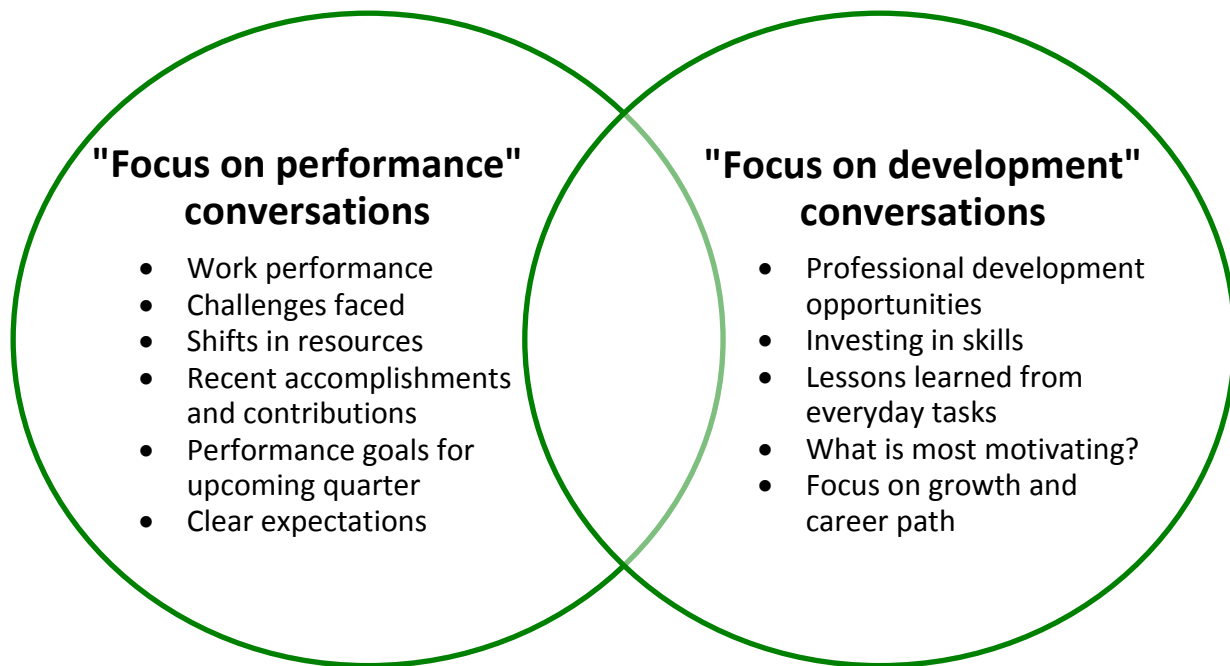
Learning about the brain changes everything: David Rock at TEDxTokyo  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDlyxx>

### ***Quarterly conversations don’t replace talking about performance in the moment!***

When you see an employee do something especially well, or you see something they missed or a way they could have done something better, don’t wait for a formal quarterly conversation! Encourage reflection in-the-moment, or as soon as possible after the event.

Start by asking the employee how he or she thought things went, what they might have done differently, what they would change if they could do it over, or had more time, or more resources. Often employees will have more insight than we give them credit for – if they can figure it out, they don’t need your observations and suggestions; they need your encouragement. Remember that your questions will usually be much more valuable than your advice because good questions encourage self-reflection and self-awareness – where any commitment to change has to start. Quarterly conversations are also a great time to revisit the little changes employees were going to make, new strategies or behaviors they were going to try out. Did they follow through? How did it go?

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



***Best Practice Tips:***

- Don't wait until formal quarterly conversations to talk to your employees.
- Touch base frequently and informally to provide '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. In addition, regularly coaching your employees demonstrates your clear commitment to their success. 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:

- Brief, often spontaneous conversations designed to quickly share knowledge relevant to a specific problem or help an employee 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 the employee to identify career aspirations;
- Thought-provoking questions designed to help employees discover the "right" answer themselves.

### Best Practice Tip

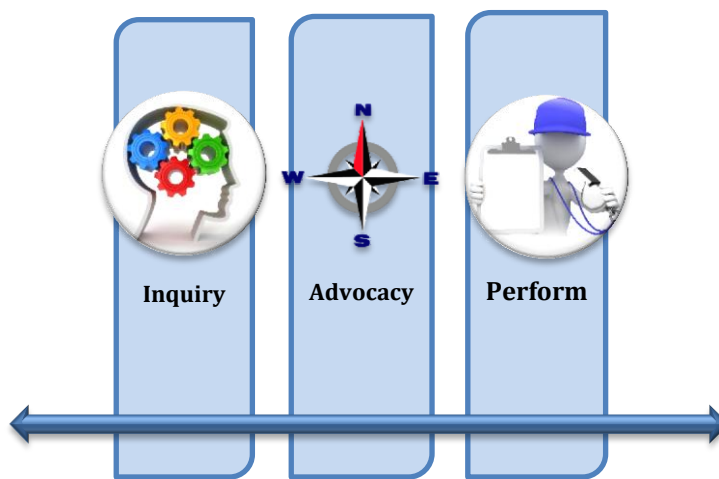
Use the space on the Quarterly Conversations Record to document feedback conversations with employees throughout the year. Include:

- ✓ dates
- ✓ key ideas
- ✓ next steps
- ✓ mutual responsibilities

Reference at year end when preparing for annual review conversations.

In general, when you use a coaching mindset, you take the perspective that: *the answers are within the employee; my role is to help draw those out.* Coaching is often more effective than "telling" because it:

- Minimizes the chance for defensiveness that can occur in a performance conversation,
- Increases the quality of the communication and openness to feedback,
- Helps employees realize their capability to address issues and make improvements, and
- Ensures employees feel a sense of ownership in the solution.



## Coaching Approaches

There are many coaching models, but most of them can be grouped into two general categories: advocacy or inquiry. **Advocacy-based coaching** is useful when the employee may have difficulty finding a solution on his or her own, may lack experience or knowledge that is necessary to move forward, or may need guidance to correct a performance issue. **Inquiry-based coaching** encourages the employee to lead the way and draw his or her own conclusions based on thoughtful reflection.

The main difference between advocacy- and inquiry-based approaches is the amount of specific direction you provide (which will vary based on the reason for the coaching). Neither approach is correct on its own without considering the context. Understanding the situation and your employee is the key to selecting the right coaching tool or blend of tools.

Inquiry	Advocacy
<p>When applying the inquiry approach, you take the role of a partner or a catalyst to action. Your role in this situation is to craft thoughtful questions that help the employee discover a way to drive the desired change.</p> <p><b>Use this approach to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Motivate staff to even higher levels of performance</li> <li>● Encourage ideas</li> <li>● Build on strengths</li> <li>● Support empowerment</li> <li>● Support career growth and development</li> </ul> <p><b>Key activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Focus on asking questions that help an employee identify next steps – this promotes ownership for change</li> <li>● Use your expertise and act as a role model for achieving the desired outcome in practice or in conversation</li> <li>● Provide access to necessary resources</li> <li>● Encourage an employee's ownership of solutions, decisions and next steps</li> <li>● Listen actively by concentrating on what is actually being said and repeating the words to reinforce value and develop the employee's thinking</li> </ul> <p><b>Sample coaching questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What opportunities do we have in this [work unit, project, etc.] that we might be overlooking? What suggestions do you have?</li> <li>● What task assignments can we find to build on your skills? What areas interest you?</li> <li>● Would you like to take on more responsibility in a particular area? How can I best support you?</li> <li>● What skills might you have that we can take better advantage of?</li> </ul>	<p>When applying the advocacy approach, you provide specific guidance to drive necessary changes. You still use open-ended questions and discussion to collect information from your employee; however, you play a more directive role in creating plans, making assignments, or establishing next steps.</p> <p><b>Use this approach to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Guide employees who may lack the skills or knowledge needed to move forward</li> <li>● Help staff perform at the expected level</li> <li>● Identify steps to change specific problematic behaviors</li> <li>● Address performance issues</li> </ul> <p><b>Key activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ask questions to establish facts, uncover motives or clarify details</li> <li>● Explicitly guide next steps to help the employee move forward on the right path</li> <li>● Draw on your own experience or expertise to suggest solutions, decisions or next steps</li> <li>● Use specific behavioral examples to illustrate expected levels of performance</li> <li>● Provide information or resources to support the employee's future efforts</li> <li>● Listen actively by concentrating on what is actually being said and repeating some of the words to check meaning and to value the employee's thinking</li> </ul> <p><b>Sample coaching questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● When did you do this well? Let's discuss how you accomplished this in one of those instances.</li> <li>● What may be getting in your way of success here? What can we change? How can I best support you?</li> <li>● What have you tried so far? What have you not tried yet?</li> <li>● How might you do this differently?</li> </ul>





### Matching the Approach with the Situation

The first step in determining the correct approach is having an understanding of the situation. As noted above, the best way to do this is through questions. Sometimes a framework for planning your questions and directing the conversation is also useful. The GROW framework is a model that many find useful in this regard. It starts by clarifying the relevant goals and assessing the current situation. This lays the foundation for the next steps, generating options and developing an action plan or strategy.

### Coaching Conversations: Use the GROW Framework

Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Have your employee articulate his or her ultimate goal for the situation.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Prompt the employee to talk through it with you if they struggle to articulate it directly right away.</li></ul></li></ul>
Reality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Ask your employee to explain what is currently happening with the situation.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ This will help you understand, but more importantly it also helps the employee “talk it out” and fully explore the situation.</li></ul></li></ul>
Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Facilitate your employee’s brainstorming of potential solutions.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Thinking in this phase should not be limited by constraints.</li><li>○ Ideas do not have to be feasible or realistic.</li></ul></li></ul>
Way Forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Empower your employee to decide what solution he or she wants to go forward with, as well as how to get started on that solution.</li></ul>

When using the GROW framework, it is best to start with the least directive coaching approach and only move to sharing more of your observations, ideas, and advice when the employee is struggling to come up with the answers on his or her own. When it appears that your input would truly add value, you might simply ask the employee you are coaching if they would like to hear some of your observations, ideas, or assessments of the situation or possible solutions.

John Whitmore was the first to publish GROW in his book *Coaching for Performance* (1992) which rapidly became the coaching bible for managers and executive coaches alike, selling over a million copies in 23 languages. Whitmore is careful to warn that, like any model, GROW is not the truth, nor is GROW by itself coaching. It is necessary first to develop a coaching mindset and authentic coaching behaviors in order to discover how powerful GROW can be.

## Coaching Skills Self-Assessment

Developing your coaching skills takes practice. Taking stock of the extent to which you currently demonstrate various coaching behaviors can be useful for identifying coaching skills that you want to develop as you interact with your employees. Use the following *coaching skills assessment* to do an informal self-assessment of your coaching strengths and needs.

Coaching Skills Self-Assessment				
Behavior	Highly Effective	Effective	Development Area	Unsure
I try to understand what motivates each member of my team.				
I encourage employees to share their ideas.				
I encourage employees to establish challenging goals.				
I provide employees with opportunities to make decisions or influence work approaches.				
I provide constructive feedback when needed.				
I recognize employees who make valued contributions towards goals and objectives.				
I regularly provide guidance or advice to employees to help them grow or develop new skills.				
I encourage my staff to take ownership over making decisions or finding solutions.				
I use open-ended questions to encourage honest dialogue about issues or concerns.				

Once you complete the assessment, look over your ratings and consider:

- What areas are strengths and how can you leverage them to provide more frequent or effective coaching?
- What steps do you need to take to address development areas? For example, consider whether you can work with a trusted colleague to practice or talk through best approaches for carrying out the behavior with which you struggle.
- For items you are unsure about, ask for feedback from a trusted colleague who may be able to help you determine your skill level for that item.

# Providing Informal Feedback



Providing feedback through routine conversations or interactions with your employees is a good way to make feedback less intimidating and more of a habit.

- Engage in a two-way conversation about the employee’s performance – start by asking for their observations and insights. Even asking for feedback on how you can support your employees before providing feedback can assist with having a smoother conversation.
- Focus on identifying and providing support for skill development and growth
- While it can occur “on the spot,” make sure the setting is appropriate (e.g., private if feedback is less than positive) and maintain a structure to the conversation to ensure it is productive; have 2 or 3 “go to” questions you are comfortable with
- Request feedback from employees yourself to learn how you can improve as a supervisor, and at the same time, model positive, professional responses to both positive and negative feedback.

## Seize the Moment

### Great questions to commit to memory

“I noticed [observation about the situation]. What did you think of that?”

“XYZ event happened. If you had to do this again tomorrow, what might you do differently?”

“What are next steps? How can I help you?”

“What feedback do you have for me?”

Be sure to take advantage of opportunities to provide **positive feedback** to recognize great work and reinforce the specific actions or attitudes that contributed to the desired outcomes. Regular positive feedback will also reduce the anxiety most people feel when a supervisor schedules a check-in or initiates a discussion about performance.

## Identify Informal Feedback Opportunities

At a regular time each day, glance at this list of questions to help you stay sensitized to opportunities to provide informal feedback to your employees.

Positive Feedback Opportunities	Development Feedback Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Did any of my employees demonstrate improvement in a skill or subskill?</li> <li>✓ Did my employees go out of their way to support their colleagues?</li> <li>✓ Did my employees demonstrate USAID’s core values?</li> <li>✓ Did any of my employees go above and beyond what I asked of them?</li> <li>✓ Have I heard positive feedback from others about my employees?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Did I see opportunities for improvement in someone’s work?</li> <li>✓ Did I see behaviors from my employees that reflect poorly on the work unit?</li> <li>✓ Did any of my employees fail to meet my expectations for their performance?</li> <li>✓ Are any of my employees struggling with a particular task or skill?</li> <li>✓ Have I received constructive feedback from others about my employees?</li> </ul>

## Use Teachable Moments

One way to give effective informal feedback is to use everyday events as teachable moments. The goal of a teachable moment is to promote learning and awareness of how to improve. To take advantage of a teachable moment, don't spend a lot of time discussing what went wrong. Use the opportunity to discuss what could be done differently in future.

Traditional approaches to feedback (such as the "situation, behavior, impact" model) focus on helping the other person understand what happened in the past and the impact of one's behavior on others. These models of feedback are limiting because the emphasis is on telling the other person what he or she did wrong and not on learning from the experience.

In contrast, teachable moments have the following characteristics:

- The focus is on understanding what happened and why for the purpose of learning and improving for the future.
- They involve questions and two-way dialogue to uncover lessons learned from a prior event that can be applied to future situations.
- Instead of focusing on "what you should have done" teachable moments are designed to encourage reflection and discussion about what the individual might do differently next time.
- The discussion focuses on process more than outcomes. The outcome is what happened and the process is how that outcome came about. Coaching is more acceptable when it is focused on process because it provides a way for people to understand how to improve and not just what to improve.

Offering to brainstorm with someone, or talk through pros and cons of different options, or generate some "what if?" scenarios can be tremendously helpful when someone really isn't sure how to handle a tough situation. *And it lets you off the hook!*

### Contrasting Traditional Feedback with Teachable Moments

*Traditional Feedback:* "At the last staff meeting, you did a nice job of setting the agenda and kicking things off. However, you didn't engage the quieter members of the group and you let Sam dominate the conversation."

*Teachable Moment:* "Let's discuss how that meeting went. What did you think went well? I agree the agenda was very clear and well organized – what was your strategy for getting such an effective agenda?" ...

"Anything you'd do differently next time in terms of handling the meeting itself?" ...

"Yes, I agree, Sam really did dominate the conversation. Want to brainstorm for a few minutes about ways to handle this kind of situation?"

***Supervisors don't have all the answers, and don't need to pretend they do or feel like they should!***

Brainstorming or using a problem-solving strategy or an analytical framework can stimulate creative thinking, shift one's perspective, lighten the mood (a little humor, a crazy idea now and then never hurts!), and allow you to get your good ideas out there without coming across as someone who always has all the answers.

# Effective Recognition Practices



Research indicates that recognition is one of the most powerful ways to motivate employees, build trust, and drive employee engagement.

## Why is Recognition Important?

Recognition is fundamentally about relationships. We all want our contributions and efforts to be acknowledged by our supervisor and our peers. While we might assume that recognition requires money, research indicates that simply acknowledging good work and saying thank you for a job well done can have an enormous impact on employee morale and performance. For example, a Globoforce/Society of Human Resource Management study\* found that:

- Appreciation inspires not only emotional commitment but also extra effort.
- Recognition drives positive employee behavior and supports learning and development goals.

## Effective Recognition Practices

Best Practice	Practical Application
<b>Be Specific</b> Praise specific actions so employees know exactly what they did right and what behavior to repeat in the future. This also lets other employees know what behaviors or outcomes the Agency values.	<b>Less Effective:</b> "Great job working with that partner." <b>More Effective:</b> "Great job working with the upset partner today. Your calm demeanor and clear explanation calmed her down and got us back on track very quickly."
<b>Recognize the Right Behaviors</b> Be sure you recognize behaviors that are linked to mission or work unit success, not expected behaviors or unimportant outcomes.	<b>Less Effective:</b> "Thank you for turning in the weekly reports on time." <b>More Effective:</b> "Great job on your weekly reports. They are always clearly written and address all key issues in addition to being timely."
<b>Personalize Your Approach</b> Tailor your approach to the employee's preferences, not your own style. For example, one person may wish to be acknowledged in a public setting (such as a staff meeting) while another employee might prefer that you acknowledge him or her in private.	<b>Less Effective:</b> Make one nice remark about each employee during the monthly staff meeting. <b>More Effective:</b> Learn how each employee prefers to be recognized and customize your approach.
<b>Be Positive and Authentic</b> To have the greatest impact, keep your recognition in public completely positive. (You can provide other feedback later, in private.) But don't hand out gratuitous compliments. Be sure your remarks are authentic and sincere.	<b>Less Effective:</b> "Great job team! Next time, I would like us to focus more on..." <b>More Effective:</b> "Kim's attention to detail helped us build a quality product while Jeff's project management skills kept us on track even when we faced unexpected hurdles. Suri always made sure that we..."

Best Practice	Practical Application
<b>Be Timely</b> Acknowledge employee accomplishments when they occur. Make sure your employees know you appreciate their work now.	<b>Less Effective:</b> Saving all praise and recognition for discussion during the performance appraisal conversation. <b>More Effective:</b> Recognize good work immediately.
<b>Look for Less Obvious Opportunities</b> Some recognition opportunities are easy to recognize, such as when the team met a challenging deadline or when an employee produced an exceptional deliverable. Others are less obvious and can be easily overlooked; look out for less obvious recognition opportunities.	Think outside of the box and consider recognizing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Someone who takes appropriate risks or operates outside of his or her comfort zone (for example, a new employee who shares ideas during team meetings).</li> <li>- An employee or team who develops innovative ideas, even if the ideas aren't implemented.</li> <li>- Someone whose background contributions help build success.</li> </ul>
<b>Encourage Your Staff to Recognize Each Other</b> You won't notice every single time someone does something well. Team members are often better positioned to observe good performance. Ask your team to regularly share their own accomplishments and the good work they observe from others.	Before team meetings, ask your employees if they would like to recognize another team member. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Make it a habit before meetings to ask employees to share their own or others successes.</li> <li>- Regularly open team meetings with "First, let's talk about what we've done well this week/month."</li> </ul>

\* SHRM (2013). *SHRM/Globoforce Survey: Employee Recognition Programs, Spring 2013.*

# Constructive Feedback Conversations



## 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. The problem for a supervisor trying to have a constructive feedback conversation is that an employee's receptiveness to feedback is reduced to near zero if defensive reactions have kicked in.

**Symbolic threats** are often the trigger for a defensive reaction.

These include:

- Lack of respect
- Lack of appreciation
- Lack of trust
- Not being listened to
- Being unfairly blamed or criticized

### Overcoming Fear of Feedback

When you get into the habit of receiving and giving effective feedback regularly, it loses its power to threaten self-image, and also becomes more comfortable to give. Over time, delivering honest, candid feedback will feel like part of the culture.

## How to Make Feedback Conversations Better

As a supervisor, you must be aware of this underlying defensive dynamic and its causes so you can avoid creating a symbolic threat and prepare and plan for how to manage emotions during the conversation.

If you model asking for feedback, and express appreciation when your employees give and ask for and respond to feedback, you can gradually remove some of the dread most of us feel when someone says, "Could you come into my office for a minute? I'd like to give you some feedback..."

When employees **ask** for feedback it is a much more comfortable situation for the giver and receiver alike. So take every opportunity to model and reinforce asking for specific, honest feedback. When you need to give unsolicited feedback, you need to be prepared to take steps to prevent and/or mitigate defensive reactions during constructive feedback conversations.

### Prevent

Make sure feedback is consistent with the *Hallmarks of Effective Feedback* guidance below, and structure the conversation with your employee following the *Steps for an Effective Performance Conversation*.

### Mitigate

Leverage a coaching approach to move away from "telling" and reduce the chances for a symbolic threat to be perceived. (*See the Overview of Coaching.*)

## Hallmarks of Effective Feedback

### Productive

- Begin by framing the feedback as an opportunity to learn rather than a judgment about a weakness.
- Give feedback in the spirit of trying to help the employee succeed and not catching the employee doing something wrong.

### Specific

- Reference specific actions the employee took, behaviors, or specific pieces of the work.
- The more specific you are, the easier it is for the other person to understand the situation and take follow-up action.
- Use the STAR model to help you provide details.
  - Situation/Task – provide context; what was the situation or task where the behavior occurred
  - Action – describe the employee’s actions
  - Results – Note the outcome of the employee’s actions

**Right way:** “In the meeting this morning, I noticed that you were looking at your cell phone the entire time. This made me feel like you were not paying attention and not engaged in the conversation.”

**Wrong way:** “You need to start paying more attention.”

### Timely

- Give feedback as soon as possible after an event and in the moment, if feasible, as long as it is in private.

**Right way:** “I just got a call from a customer about a challenging interaction that you had yesterday afternoon. Can we talk about it in my office for a few minutes?”

**Wrong way:** “I’ve been meaning to tell you – several weeks ago I got a complaint about the way you handled a customer interaction.”

### Relevant

- Feedback should help the employee do his or her job better and be within the individual’s power to improve.
- Focus on behaviors and not the person.
- Focus on the most significant issues and not on every little mistake.

**Right way:** “I noticed that you had a few typos in the report. Next time you might want to ask someone to review the report for errors before submitting the final version. It helps to have a fresh pair of eyes review your work sometimes.”

**Wrong way:** “You don’t seem to like writing very much.”

### Accurate and Fair

- Feedback should focus on things that impede work from being performed efficiently or effectively, and not preferences about how or when to conduct work that have no material impact on success.



## Steps for an Effective Feedback Conversation

1. Plan	2. Ask	3. Describe	4. Listen	5. Agree
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Plan what to say and be specific about what to stop, add, change, or continue in the future</li><li>- Make a list of examples (of both effective and ineffective behaviors) that you can refer to easily during the conversation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Ask the employee for input about why the behavior, performance, or situation is occurring</li><li>- Ask the employee for their opinions about strengths they can leverage</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Describe how the behaviors, not personal characteristics, are effective or ineffective, and how they affect others</li><li>- Ask the employee to describe what behaviors they have noticed in themselves and others</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Make it a two-way dialogue; be open to hearing the employee's view about how your own behavior may be contributing to the situation</li><li>- Practice active listening; repeat observations back to the employee to ensure mutual understanding</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Agree on how the issue will be resolved or how you will otherwise proceed</li><li>- Let the employee know that you will be available for check-ins after the formal conversation is over</li></ul>

*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.

## Extra Tips for Managing the Conversation

No matter what happens, you can stay in control of the conversation. Use these tips to help you manage conversation and keep it moving in the right direction.

- **Use your coaching skills.** Coaching skills like asking good, open-ended questions and actively listening will ensure that your employee stays engaged and involved in the conversation. It also signals that you are curious and engaged as well. Employees are likely to feel a much greater sense of ownership and commitment to decisions and action plans developed during a collaborative.
- **Stay focused and engaged.** Eliminate any distractions and practice being fully present in the conversation. Bringing your full attention to the conversation demonstrates respect and helps to build a sense of trust and a willingness on the part of the employee to fully engage in the conversation as well.
- **Monitor and manage your own emotions.** Pay attention to your own emotions. Don't just react. Remember that emotion works faster than cognition, so sometimes you might need to give yourself some time to process your thoughts and feelings before responding. Be aware of how your emotional reactions will affect your employee's own emotions. Take a break if emotions are running high.
- **Show empathy.** Put yourself in your employee's shoes and try to take his/her perspective to understand the challenges, concerns, or emotions he or she might be feeling. Let your employee know that you feel empathy by reflecting back his/her expressed feelings and emotions. For example, if an employee expresses feelings of frustration, say something like, "you sound frustrated and I feel frustrated for you because of this situation."
- **Use non-verbal behavior effectively.** Effective communication goes beyond listening and talking. You convey your thoughts, emotions, and level of engagement to others through your non-verbal behavior. Make an effort to use good eye contact and gestures like nodding your head to convey your encouragement and involvement in the conversation. Avoid discouraging behaviors like crossing your arms, yawning, and being easily distracted.

## Understanding Common Reactions to Feedback

Delivering performance feedback can elicit a range of different responses. Understanding these reactions, especially negative reactions, and ways to handle them helps you to be more candid and timely in providing valuable feedback.

Employee reaction	When responding, do:	But don't:	Sample response
<b>Hostility, Resistance, Denial</b> "I don't know what you're talking about. I provide great customer service!"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Provide sufficient examples to support your feedback</li> <li>✓ Gauge the employee's reasons for resistance</li> <li>✓ Candidly discuss the consequences if the employee does not address the development area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Get aggravated with the employee's open hostility and resistance to your feedback</li> <li>✗ Soften your feedback to alleviate the reaction</li> </ul>	"Let's review the examples I gave of areas where I see an opportunity for improvement."
<b>Indifference</b> "Yeah, I guess I can do that."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Ask the employee to reflect on the development areas and confirm whether he/she is able to commit to them</li> <li>✓ Discuss the consequences of denial if the employee does not commit to improving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Overlook the employee's indifference and non-commitment toward the feedback</li> <li>✗ Lose patience with the employee</li> </ul>	"I'd like you to think about what we discussed and whether it's something you can put the required effort toward developing."
<b>Lack of Confidence, Self-Pity</b> "I knew this would happen; I can never do anything right."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Assure the employee that improvement is possible with effort – use past examples of his/her successful development</li> <li>✓ Reassure him/her that you will offer support</li> <li>✓ Provide examples of small steps the employee can take toward improvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Focus on the employee's past inability to achieve outcomes</li> <li>✗ Moderate your feedback to alleviate the reaction</li> </ul>	"You will have support from me as you work on this. For example..."
<b>Not Taking Responsibility</b> "It's not my fault..."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Listen to the employee's reasons and situation</li> <li>✓ Restate the examples</li> <li>✓ Clarify that the employee will need to meet expectations and improve performance despite his/her reasons</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Agree with the employee when he/she blames other people</li> <li>✗ Change your perspective based on the reasons or excuses if they are not valid</li> </ul>	"I know this might be difficult for you to focus on, but the fact remains that I need you to work productively with your peers."
<b>Shock, Anger</b> "This is ridiculous. I always knew you didn't like me..."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Acknowledge the fact that the employee is not satisfied with the feedback</li> <li>✓ Prod the employee for options and comments</li> <li>✓ Restate examples; explain your perspective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Become defensive</li> <li>✗ Moderate your feedback to alleviate the reaction</li> </ul>	"If I understand correctly, you are angry because you feel that I have not given you enough challenging work, and you feel you should have been promoted. Is that correct?"

# Soliciting 360 Degree Feedback



Sometimes supervisors are not in a position to observe and provide employees with potentially valuable feedback on their performance in a particular situation. Other times, the supervisor's perspective is only one of several perspectives it is useful to have reflected in the feedback. Both situations highlight the importance of 360 feedback for Employee Performance and Development. Sources of feedback may include peers, subordinates, more senior USAID or USG staff, or partners who are external to USAID. The important thing is to make sure you only ask people for feedback if they were in a position to observe and assess what you are asking about. There is a 360 feedback tool in ePerformance that makes it very easy to solicit and store 360 feedback on each Foreign Service Officer you supervise.

Soliciting feedback as projects are wrapped up or significant events occur throughout the year is the most effective way to leverage 360 feedback; examples will be more specific and the feedback more useful if the details are still fresh in everyone's mind. However, if feedback has not been received throughout the year, a supervisor must, at a minimum, solicit 360 feedback at the end of the year to inform the Skills Assessment and the Annual Review Conversation. Input from subordinates is especially important if the employee is also a supervisor. Sharing this feedback in a thoughtful, constructive way will help enrich the end-of-year Skills Assessment and more general discussions about performance, contributions, and professional development goals and strategies for the future.

## Best Practice Tip

Use the ePerformance 360 feedback tool and the Quarterly Conversation Record to store feedback received throughout the year.

Reference feedback at year end when preparing for annual review conversations.

## Process for Soliciting and Conveying 360 Degree Feedback

Throughout the Year	End of the Year
<p>You are encouraged to solicit 360 degree feedback throughout the year. Specifically, good times to solicit feedback include when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. A task/project is completed</li><li>b. Progress is made on a work objective</li><li>c. Interim deliverables are turned in</li><li>d. A significant meeting is held for which the employee is responsible</li><li>e. A new task or skill is being carried out for the first time</li><li>f. A difficult task or assignment is completed</li><li>g. An employee is mid-way through a stretch assignment</li></ul>	<p>Well before the Skills Assessment at the end of the performance cycle you and your employee should meet to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Discuss who might be good sources of feedback on skills, especially skill development objectives</li><li>b. Discuss the kinds of feedback that would be especially helpful to the employee</li><li>c. Answer any questions the employee has about your 360 degree feedback process and the types of questions you typically ask.</li></ul>

Note that the 360 feedback process is different from the more formal and structured process used to solicit confidential, Multisource Ratings (MSRs) for promotion packages. 360 feedback can be solicited frequently (vs once a year for promotion eligibles only) and cover more topics (anything work related, not just core skills) and can include rich descriptions of situations and specific examples and suggestions (instead of just a numerical rating). In fact, it is the specific examples and context descriptions (e.g., the situation, the impact) that make 360 feedback so valuable for learning and development. In addition to highlighting both strengths and areas

for development, getting feedback from people with different perspectives and priorities can stimulate self-reflection and enhance self-awareness.

One element that both 360 feedback and MSR rating processes have in common is the importance of the rater selection process. When selecting raters for either purpose you should carefully consider several factors:<sup>2</sup>

- a. Has the individual worked with the employee long enough to have observed him/her in a variety of situations?
  - b. Does the employee depend on this person to get work done?
  - c. Will the individual be willing to engage in an honest, reflective conversation about the employee and his/her performance?
  - d. Does the individual understand the nature of the employee's work and the challenges and opportunities he/she faces?
  - e. Are you including individuals who can provide a range of feedback (i.e., both positive and negative)?
2. For good 360 feedback you must also think about the kinds of questions you would to ask. If you choose to solicit feedback via email you might want to consider questions like those in the table below. Several types of items and examples are provided. The relationship and kinds of interactions the feedback provider had with the employee (e.g., only received work products, vs worked together on a team, vs observed in meetings) need to be considered in deciding which questions or topics are appropriate for which feedback sources.

Example 360 Feedback Items
<b>Global Assessment Items</b>
How would you feel about working with this person again? <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Extremely negative</li><li>b. Negative</li><li>c. Neither positive nor negative</li><li>d. Positive</li><li>e. Extremely positive</li><li>f. I don't know/Not applicable to me</li></ol> <p>Please explain why you feel the way you do; use specific examples.</p>
<b>USAID Core Values Items</b>
How has [Name of Employee] demonstrated USAID's Core Values while working with you? <p>Please provide specific examples.</p>

<sup>2</sup> Lepsinger, R., & Lucia, A. D. (2001). Performance management and decision making. In D. W. Bracken, C. W. Timmreck & A. H. Church (Eds.), *The handbook of multisource feedback: The comprehensive resource for designing and implementing MSF processes; the handbook of multisource feedback: The comprehensive resource for designing and implementing MSF processes* (pp. 318-334, Chapter xlv, 557 Pages) Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.

### Skill Assessment Items

As you have worked with [Name of Employee], you have may have witnessed both strengths and areas for development. Which Core Skills or subskills from the FS/SFS Skills Framework appear to you to be strengths? Which would you suggest as areas for improvement?

Please describe as specifically as you can what [Name] did or said that led you to identify a skill/subskill as a strength or area for improvement.

[Name of Employee] is working on building his/her skills in X area.

Please share your observations on his/her performance and development in this area.

### Work Objectives and Expectations Items

One of [Name of Employee]'s work objectives this year is to: [Example: Strategically engage traditional leaders and identify innovative approaches to ensure country buy-in and accelerated progress towards HIV/AIDS epidemic control for Country X]. Specifically, in this quarter s/he was asked to [Example: organize focus group meetings in 3 districts with village heads].

Please provide your input, using specific examples, on how [Name] performed in meeting this goal.

3. Once you've determined the questions you want to ask each individual, reach out to feedback sources and ask them how they would prefer to give their feedback (e.g., in-person interview, phone call, or e-mail). The boxes below present recommendations for preparing for each type of collection method.

#### In-Person/Phone Call

Prepare a quiet and private space to conduct the interview

Prepare and send relevant material to show the individual (e.g., the employee's work objectives, FS/SFS Skills Framework, etc.)

Be prepared to take detailed notes

#### E-mail (regular email, or email using ePerformance 360 feedback tool)

Include relevant material in the e-mail (e.g., the employee's work objectives, FS/SFS Skills Framework, etc.)

Proofread e-mail to make sure each item is specific and clear

4. In the course of the conversation/e-mail exchange, make sure you:
- Collect specific examples of performance and accomplishments
  - Ignore comments that don't relate to job performance
  - Stay alert for language that suggests the individual is giving information that is inaccurate, unfair, or biased.

\*Remember, all 360 feedback should remain confidential and names should not be shared with the employee during feedback discussions, however it can be useful to indicate the perspective different kinds of feedback might be reflecting (e.g., collaborator on a project vs partner or beneficiary).

# Observing Behavior and Diagnosing Performance Challenges



If a performance issue is persistent, it is important for you to take the time to observe and try to diagnose the underlying issue(s). The following steps can help guide your observations and facilitate your efforts to diagnose these types of performance challenges.

## 1. Gather information from multiple sources

- First-hand observations
- Peer feedback
- Stakeholder feedback
- Direct report feedback

## 2. Gather information from different kinds of situations and events

## 3. Observe first, judge later

- Record just the facts at first: what was the situation, what did the person specifically do in the situation, what was the result
- After recording, analyze to determine
  - Did the behavior cause the result or were there other factors that had an impact?
  - How powerful was the situation? Did the situation determine the behavior or did the person have many choices about how to behave, given the situation? Consider the possible underlying circumstance(s)
    - Unclear expectations?
    - Lack of skills?
    - Lack of motivation?
    - Lack of insight?
    - Environmental factors?
  - What themes did you notice? How do these themes fit with the skills required for success (e.g., communication, interpersonal effectiveness)?
  - Is this consistent with other behavior you have observed or a one-time incident?
  - Was the behavior effective or ineffective? If ineffective, what could have been done differently?

## 4. Be curious about the reasons behind the behavior. Use the table below for ideas.

**Be mindful of and try to avoid common human biases and errors when observing behavior**

**Leniency** – judging the whole person positively because of a few good qualities

**Harshness** – judging the whole person negatively because of a few bad qualities

**Primacy** – focusing on the first impression and ignoring subsequent information

**Recency** – focusing on what happened most recently and not on longer-term patterns of behavior

**Attribution** – tending to view other's mistakes as indicative of character flaws while viewing your own mistakes as due to circumstances

Persistent Patterns (not just a one-time incident)	Possible Causes	How to Investigate Further
<b>Stalling behavior:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asks a lot of questions about assignments</li> <li>Spends a lot of time seeking additional information,</li> <li>Repeatedly asks for clarity of roles and responsibilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is uncertain about how to proceed but is reluctant to ask for fear of looking foolish</li> <li>Does not want to do the assignment but is unwilling to say so</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address what you have observed and ask if there is something that's bothering them about the assignment that they have not mentioned before; note that several conversations may be required to develop a full understanding of why the person is reluctant to complete the assignment</li> </ul>
<b>Poor attention to detail:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work has errors</li> <li>Work looks sloppy</li> <li>Some components of the work are not turned in at all</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has too much on his/her plate</li> <li>Lacks attention to detail skills</li> <li>Does not like the task so is rushing through it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examine work assignments to ensure the person is not overloaded</li> <li>Ask for a description of the process they use for quality control (e.g., use a reviewer, proofreading practices, use of any checklists to ensure work is accurate and complete)</li> </ul>
<b>Poor quality:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work products are not well structured</li> <li>Products are incomplete</li> <li>Products are not well written</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skill and knowledge deficits</li> <li>Lack of experience</li> <li>Lack of ability</li> <li>Unclear expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate knowledge, skills, experience, and ability requirements of the task and person and determine if there are gaps</li> <li>Ask person to provide his/her understanding of the expectations for the assignment to determine if they are accurate</li> </ul>
<b>Poor time management:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work is late or done at the last minute</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lacks basic time-management skills (e.g., keeping to-do lists, etc.)</li> <li>Believes that s/he works best under pressure and positive reinforcement for this behavior in the past</li> <li>Unclear expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask for a description of their approach to time management</li> <li>Ask questions about past experience working to deadlines and consequences of turning things in at the last minute</li> <li>Ask person to provide his/her understanding of the expectations for the assignment to determine if they are accurate</li> </ul>
<b>Slow production:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work takes a long time to complete</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Skill and knowledge deficits</li> <li>Lack of experience</li> <li>Lack of ability</li> <li>Has too much on his/her plate</li> <li>Analysis paralysis</li> <li>Lacks insight as to how much time to invest in each activity</li> <li>Unclear expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate knowledge, skills, experience, and ability requirements of the task and person and determine if there are gaps</li> <li>Ask person to provide his/her understanding of the expectations for the assignment to determine if they are accurate</li> <li>Ask person to talk through how they approach the task, where they spend the most time, how they make decisions about where to focus, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Not taking responsibility for own actions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blames others when things go wrong</li> <li>Argumentative and reacts defensively when challenged</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>May be insecure about own knowledge and skills</li> <li>May lack a realistic awareness of the impact of his/her actions on the outcome</li> <li>Feels being 'right' is very important has a strong need to prove s/he is 'right'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask the person just to focus on his/her role and to analyze what went well and what s/he could have done differently</li> <li>Ask about likely impact of his/her actions on the outcome – purpose is to determine the degree to which the person is aware of his or her own contributions to the situation</li> </ul>
<b>Excessive complaining</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stress</li> <li>Frustration at not being 'heard'</li> <li>Sees "venting" as a way to form social relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask the person to propose solutions along with raising issues</li> <li>Ask about what outlets s/he has for managing stress (e.g., talking with friends, exercise, etc.)</li> </ul>
<b>Treats others with disrespect or lack of courtesy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lacks awareness of impact of own behavior on others</li> <li>Is distrustful of others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address impact behavior has on others and observe response. Does the person appear contrite (lack of awareness) or defensive (lack of trust)?</li> </ul>





### 3. Review Performance

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*While informal conversations throughout the year are vital for engaging and developing your employees, 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.*

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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 employees throughout the year as opportunities for positive and constructive feedback arise, and you may 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 employees have guidance materials that will help prepare them 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 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 Word version of the [Foreign Service Annual Performance Evaluation Form](#) 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 assessment that the employee's performance is or is not "Satisfactory." A "Satisfactory" rating means that the employee is meeting the basic expectations for the job and demonstrating the skill proficiency levels expected of an employee at that 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](#), 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 near 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.

Fortunately, when supervisors engage in regular conversations with employees about performance, and also

take steps to clarify expectations and check-in more frequently when performance challenges or problems begin to surface, performance will usually improve without the need for a PIP. You should never raise an ongoing or systemic performance issue for the first time in an Annual Performance Evaluation conversation unless the supervisor first became aware of it during the final quarter of the rating cycle.

A supervisor's approach to dealing with performance problems should begin at the inquiry end of the coaching and feedback continuum and progressively move forward to the performance coaching end of the continuum as needed. For example, as you partner with the employee to thoughtfully develop options for getting to a goal or improving performance, you may discover that they need more direction and guidance. This would warrant a shift to a more advocacy-based approach in which you use questions to understand the situation but play a more directive role. If you determine that this more directive role is not resulting in performance improvement, it is time to develop specific objectives and performance targets and put them in writing. This may be done in the context of a formal performance counseling session.

In a counseling session with an employee the supervisor must cover the following topics:

- a. Describe the problem area, i.e., the work objectives or responsibilities the employee is not meeting or the subskills where the employee is failing to demonstrate the expected level of proficiency;
- b. Communicate the expected level of performance and what must be accomplished in order to bring performance up to the Satisfactory level.

It is best at this point to transfer relevant notes and dates from the Quarterly Conversation Record to a separate document and put explicit expectations and objectives for the employee in writing in case they are needed to support administrative actions down the road. The required elements of a PIP and processes for instituting one and next steps if an employee fails a PIP are described more fully in [ADS 464](#). Note that it is strongly recommended that you consult with HCTM once performance (or conduct, if this is the issue) reaches the point where it appears that a PIP or other formal actions might be warranted.

# Tracking Skills and Accomplishments

## Skills Assessments

The purpose of the [FS Skills Assessment](#) 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](#) 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 personnel file or to the Promotion Board.

## Quarterly Conversation Record (QCR)

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 note 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) 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.

You can help your employees with their AARs by reminding them to:

- Read instructions carefully
- Pay attention to word limits (a maximum of 75 words are 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 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

### Errors to Avoid When you Reflect on and Evaluate Skills and Performance

Ideally, you will have an accurate record of key performance examples from throughout the performance cycle to assist your evaluation of your employees' performance. But when we are reflecting on examples that span *the entire year*, it is important to recognize that memories are fallible and the human brain tends to take shortcuts when processing large volumes of information. Below are some common biases or errors that can result from these information processing shortcuts, plus suggestions for ways to mitigate them:

Rating Error	What is it?	How to Avoid It
<b>Halo</b>	Basing the overall rating on your impression of the employee's performance (either positive or negative) on one specific assignment rather than how the employee performed throughout the year.	✓ Consider multiple performance examples throughout the year and evaluate them individually
<b>Guilt by Association</b>	Making assumptions about an employee's performance based on his or her relationship with other coworkers.	✓ Focus on specific work-related results and behaviors that are attributable to the employee
<b>Central Tendency</b>	Rating all employees at the mid-point of the Skills Assessment even though performance differences exist.	✓ Rate each employee individually and make your ratings by comparing the rating scale descriptors to concrete examples of the employee's performance
<b>Recency</b>	Overall rating is based on performance toward the end of the cycle (recent work), rather than performance throughout the cycle	✓ Maintain a file with examples from throughout the year and refer to it before you make your ratings
<b>Similar-to-Me Effect</b>	Tendency to evaluate employees who are like you more positively than you rate others.	✓ Base your ratings on results and concrete examples of the impact the employee's behaviors had
<b>Contrast Effect</b>	Tendency to evaluate employees in comparison with other employees.	✓ Make your ratings based on the standards of the job and those described in the rating scale
<b>Incentive</b>	Providing an overall rating to an employee to provide motivation.	✓ Make accurate ratings and focus on engaging and motivating an employee by articulating the value of his or her contributions and connecting his or her work to the goals of the Agency
<b>Spillover</b>	Basing the overall rating on performance that occurred in years past in addition to the current performance year.	✓ Focus on performance examples that occurred in the current performance only

# Effective Annual Review Conversations

## Logistics for Annual Review Conversations

Annual review conversations with your employees 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.

## Effective Performance Conversations

An annual review conversation is an opportunity to recognize an employee's contributions during the past year, discuss development opportunities, and engage in a forward-looking discussion about what the employee should aim to contribute in the next year. If done right, your employee 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
- *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 employees to recognize accomplishments and discuss performance issues. Do not raise an ongoing or systemic performance issue for the first time in an end-of-year review conversation unless you learn about it for the first time in the last quarter. Similarly, make sure this is not the first time you are asking employees about challenges they're having accomplishing their work – you don't want to be surprised either.

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

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

## Trust is the Key

Effective review conversations require a foundation of trust. Trust reduces defensiveness, improves communication, and speeds up decision making and performance improvements. You need to work throughout the year to make sure that you have built a trusting relationship with your employees. This will support better performance and working relationships, but will also make performance conversations easier. The employee will know that you are sincere in your praise and are truly trying to support their development when discussing improvement areas.

Five Trust-Building “Do’s”	Five Trust-Destroying “Don’t Do’s”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Operate with respect</li> <li>✓ Eliminate the blame game</li> <li>✓ Consider how your actions affect others</li> <li>✓ Act with honorable intentions</li> <li>✓ Think beyond yourself – act in a way that supports greater good</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Email, text, or avoid difficult messages</li> <li>✓ Bypass the person directly involved</li> <li>✓ Operate as if others cannot be trusted</li> <li>✓ Relinquish personal accountability</li> <li>✓ Fail to deliver on commitments</li> </ul>

## Prepare

As you prepare for the annual review conversation, review the documentation you have compiled throughout the year, including your written notes, and reflect on past coaching conversations. Ask yourself the following questions to help you think through what you want to discuss with the employee.

1. What did your employee accomplish against his or her performance objectives this year? How did he or she demonstrate USAID’s core values? Is there anything outside of what was documented that he or she achieved?
  - Why were these contributions important?
  - What skills does the employee possess that contributed to his or her success?
2. What support did you provide to the employee that contributed to a successful outcome?
  - What support will you continue to provide going forward?
  - What support do you think is no longer critical?
3. What obstacles were encountered? Did the employee overcome them effectively?
  - What lessons learned should the employee take away based on dealing with these challenges?
  - How will those experiences help the employee be successful in the future?
4. Where can the employee improve or build on his or her strengths?
5. Who else may be able to provide feedback on the employee’s performance that you can communicate during the review?

It may also be helpful to ask your employee to self-rate his/her skill proficiency levels using the FS/SFS Skills Assessment before you meet with him/her. Keep in mind that you should not solicit self-ratings before you have made your ratings because it may influence how you rate the employee; however, hearing how he/she believed he/she performed is a helpful way to start the annual review conversation and to frame your feedback. 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 him or her improve that skill. On the other hand, “Coach/Mentor” may mean it is time to discuss how the employee can leverage this strength to benefit their career or the team.

You may also want to review some of the tip sheets related to *Ongoing Coaching and Feedback* to refresh your memory on strategies for effective conversations, for example, leveraging the GROW framework to structure the Annual Review Conversation with the employee. This can help employees who are stuck identify where they are currently and where they would like their career to go. Other Guidebook sections you may want to review include: Overview of Coaching, Effective Recognition Practices, and Constructive Feedback Conversations.



## Initiate a Forward-Looking Conversation

It is important for you to structure the flow of the conversation in a way that feels comfortable to you. But remember, this should not be a session aimed at sharing a year's worth of performance feedback. Feedback is most effective when given throughout the year.

Use this conversation to cover major highlights from the past year, to discuss where the employee stands on strengths and improvement areas, and what that means for the employee moving forward. Including a future-oriented component to the conversation will minimize defensive reactions and start to prepare you and your employee for the following year's objective setting and development planning activities. The conversation structure below reflects one option for a forward-looking approach.



1. **Set the stage** – identify mutual interests and express the desire for a two-way dialogue
2. **Affirmative feedback** – acknowledge the employee's contributions, accomplishments, and strengths
3. **Course-correcting feedback** – identify any areas for improvement (placing them in the context of future expectations) and offer initial suggestions for how you and the employee should plan to address them moving forward
4. **Future-focused framing** – discuss work unit challenges that lie ahead and what you see the employee needing to contribute in order to mitigate those challenges and achieve success; identify which of the employee's strengths will be beneficial
5. **Next steps** – discuss the activities and conversations that you and the employee should carry out as you plan for the next performance period (e.g., write performance objectives, create an individual development plan)

## 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 employee is different and you may need to delve more deeply into certain areas or spend less time addressing others if you already have regular conversations about the topic area with the employee. For example, if your employee is a high-performer and does not have specific performance issues that need to be thoroughly discussed (e.g., getting to the root of the problem), then you may not need to cover some of the topics listed in Section 3.

1. Set the Stage for Two-Way Dialogue and Describe the Purpose		
Specific Suggestions	Sample Leader Contributions	Sample Employee Contributions
Discuss what each person wants to achieve in the meeting	<i>I would like to be sure that we discuss... Is there anything else you would like to cover?</i>	<i>It would be really beneficial to me if we could also talk about....</i>
Make clear that this is a two-way dialogue	<i>It's important to me that this is a dialogue, and not a monologue. I'm interested in your input.</i>	<i>I appreciate the chance to have an open discussion; I'm interested in your perspective and input as well.</i>



2. Affirmative Feedback and Acknowledgement (looking back)		
Specific Suggestions	Sample Leader Contributions	Sample Employee Contributions
Acknowledge what the work unit and employee accomplished so far (to help link the employee's performance and behaviors to the higher level goals and achievements of the Agency)	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 key strengths (consistent positive performance examples). Share concrete examples of what you observed in terms of deliverables or behaviors that contributed to the work unit's success	This year, I've noticed that you: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- consistently demonstrated X behavior... [provide example such as "demonstrated your attention to detail by..."]</li> <li>- produced Y deliverable [describe quantity, quality, timeliness]</li> </ul> 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 proud of... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- consistently demonstrated X behavior... [provide example such as "demonstrated your attention to detail by..."]</li> <li>- produced Y deliverable [describe quantity, quality, timeliness]</li> </ul> I worked hard to... Part of my success was due to the fact that...

3. Specific Observations and Feedback (looking back)		
Specific Suggestions	Sample Leader Contributions	Sample Employee Contributions
Share what you observed that reflects an opportunity for development or improvement.  **Remember** - no surprises. You should have addressed these issues with the employee in prior conversations.  Share concrete examples of either project deliverables or behaviors you observed. Try to stay focused on key performance issues or areas in which a high-performer should focus on building further expertise – address 1 to 3 at most.	As we have discussed before, one of the other things I've noticed over the last year is that you have <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- consistently [behavior]... which resulted in [performance outcome]... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Example 1</li> <li>- Example 2</li> </ul> </li> <li>- completed [deliverable] which produced Y [describe quantity, quality, timeliness] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Example 1</li> <li>- Example 2</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	I would really appreciate your feedback about... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Project deliverables you think I have an opportunity to improve upon</li> <li>- Particular skills you think you I could strengthen</li> </ul> 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, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I have observed you [behavior]... and this has resulted in <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improvements in X area</li> <li>- A few remaining areas for improvement, including...</li> </ul> </li> <li>- I have not seen changes in your behavior, which has resulted in...</li> </ul>	Based on our last discussion, I have tried to... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Example 1</li> <li>- Example 2</li> </ul> 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	What might be an example of that? When you say ____ what do you mean?	What might be an example of that? When you say ____ what do you mean?

<b>help mutual problem solving and diagnosis of root causes</b>	<i>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?</i>	<i>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?</i>
<b>Engage in active listening</b>	<i>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...</i>	<i>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...</i>
<b>Own your own contributions to any issues</b>	<i>I recognize that I had a role in that... I am sorry for making that more difficult.</i>	<i>I recognize I had a role in that... I'm sorry for making that more difficult.</i>
<b>Provide initial suggestions for how to work on improving (forward looking)</b>	<i>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?</i>	<i>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...</i>

<b>4. Future-focused Framing (forward looking)</b>		
<b>Specific Suggestions</b>	<b>Sample Leader Contributions</b>	<b>Sample Employee Contributions</b>
<b>Discuss work unit/team goals for the next year</b>	<i>Based on what we know now, our major goals/deliverables for the coming year will be... The things that will make this challenging include...</i>	<i>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?</i>
<b>Discuss how either projects or the employee's strengths can contribute to meeting the future goals</b>	<i>In considering how you and your contributions factor in...</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>- I see your work (X project) as linking to these priorities and goals through...</i></li> <li><i>- I think your strengths in X will be beneficial for us achieving Y</i></li> </ul>	<i>How do you see my skillsets being leveraged to achieve our goals?</i>
<b>Solicit observations regarding opportunities for development or improvement</b>	<i>Are there any...</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>- Project deliverables you think you have an opportunity to improve upon?</i></li> <li><i>- Particular skillsets you would like to strengthen?</i></li> </ul>	<i>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.</i>

5. Next Steps and Mutual Accountabilities (forward looking)		
Specific Suggestions	Sample Leader Contributions	Sample Employee Contributions
Feedback for the supervisor	<p><i>Do you have any feedback for me about how I can better support your success?</i></p> <p><i>Are there any instances where it would help for me to communicate in a different way?</i></p>	<p><i>Thank you for asking. It would really help me if you could...</i></p> <p><i>I would appreciate specific feedback on...</i></p> <p><i>I am concerned about X, and would appreciate it if you would...</i></p>
Express positive outlook for next year	<p><i>I think this was a really helpful discussion for framing what we should focus on next year.</i></p> <p><i>Thank you again for all of your contributions. Your skillsets will be important factors in our success next year as well.</i></p>	<p><i>Yes, this was helpful for thinking through how I can best contribute next year.</i></p>
Discuss next steps for the performance cycle	<p><i>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.</i></p> <p><i>Let's put a time on the calendar for setting your performance objectives next.</i></p>	<p><i>Sounds good. I will reach out to set a date and begin drafting performance objectives based on what we discussed today.</i></p>
Close the conversation	<p><i>Thank you for taking the time to discuss. I am really looking forward to your contributions this year.</i></p> <p><i>I hope you will reach out if you need to clarify anything or need additional support.</i></p>	<p><i>Thank you for taking the time to discuss today.</i></p> <p><i>I appreciate your guidance and support.</i></p>

## After the Annual Review Conversation

After the annual review conversation, take a little time to document what was discussed and reflect on the conversation with your employee.

- Did you learn anything new about your employee's perspective on his or her performance?
- Were there issues raised that you did not realize were concerns?
- How did your employee respond to constructive feedback? What phrasing or approach seemed to help the employee understand?
- What steps or actions did you agree to take? How will you make sure you and the employee will follow through?
- What will be key milestones or markers to look for in your employee's performance in the next year?
- Is there anything you will do differently with the employee in the following year?

Add additional questions to this list from your own experiences and hold yourself accountable for the actions you plan to take over the next year.

# Appendix

## 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](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 with 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>