

# Alexander County Performance Evaluation Policy



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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The County of Alexander has recognized the relationship of position classification, job performance, and salary structure. The jobs performed by the employees have been classified to accurately describe levels of responsibility, tasks, and requirements. The pay plan has established salary ranges based upon the knowledge, skills and abilities required, relative market value, and the County's financial ability to fund.

A system for measuring performance would provide the County with a method to evaluate and improve employee performance and systematically reward employees for their performance by moving employee salaries within the established pay grades.

The process of performance evaluation is an opportunity to clarify job performances and set a level of expectations for the future. A formal performance evaluation system is designed to facilitate this process, and to ensure that everyone is treated fairly and equitably.

Constructive supervision is the very core of a productive employee-employer relationship. This relationship is either strengthened or weakened by the nature of the daily contact. Therefore, both positive and critical communication is necessary, and an environment which encourages both is the only way to improve the quality of work being done, to convey to the employee a sense of what is expected, and to recognize accomplishment.

If regular ongoing communication concerning job performance takes place, the end of the year evaluations will not be the anxiety-producing event that many people fear. Both parties will already be aware of significant events. As a result, the performance evaluation interview can be effectively utilized and focus on discussing next year's goals.

In summary, the following goals can be achieved by an effectively administered performance evaluation system:

- \*Reward employees for excellence in job performance;

- \*Encourage and improve communications between employees and their supervisors through increased understanding of the supervisor's expectations;

- \*Provide employees with specific and clear direction on what they must do in order to effectively perform the job; and

- \*Provide systematic information for future personnel actions such as promotional consideration, training opportunities, job enrichment, etc.

## **II. THE PERFORMANCE EVALUATION SYSTEM**

How does a supervisor conduct an "objective" performance evaluation? On the one hand, total objectivity regarding human behavior is probably not possible. On the other hand, when we evaluate an employee's job performance, we should strive to be as objective as possible. Fairness is the goal.

To do this in Alexander County, all performance evaluations will be job related and performance based.

### **A. Performance Factors**

Performance factors provide a uniform basis for rating performance on all employees of the County. Through the use of terms related to performance, they insure that ratings are related to the jobs performed and that personal characteristics are considered only to the extent that performance is affected.

### **B. Work Standards**

Performance factors do not establish standards. Each department head/supervisor must develop a standard for the duties and responsibilities of each employee, determine the level of performance expected and provide adequate training to the employee. Standards shall be communicated in oral or written form. Department heads are responsible for insuring that expected performance standards are consistent for the same position classification throughout the department. Supervisors are responsible and will be evaluated on their developing subordinate effectiveness by establishing reasonable standards, and by communicating and measuring them.

## **C. Performance Events**

Performance events are specific examples of work performance that represent significant success or significant failure in carrying out a duty or responsibility. These differ from "comments" in that they represent an actual accomplishment or event as compared to a comment, which is usually a general statement of performance.

Performance events are acknowledged by noting them in the employee's personnel record when they occur. The supervisor should meet with the employee and discuss the event. If the event represents success, it is a chance to personally compliment, praise, and recognize the employee. If the event represents a failure, the discussion may provide the first formal opportunity for the employee to know that he/she did not meet expected levels of performance. Additionally, it provides the opportunity to improve the event(s) and allow it to become a strength in performance. The discussion should accomplish four basic goals:

1. The employee will be informed of what happened that created a performance event.
2. The conditions and actions that created the event will be acknowledged.
3. If the event represents a success, it is an opportunity for praise and reinforcement. If the event represented a failure, expected performance levels are to be clarified.
4. An understanding between the employee and supervisor will establish how expected levels of performance can be reached and/or how performance can continue to improve to the highest level.

Performance events should be observed, recorded on the "Event Reporting Form" and discussed as often as possible on a regular basis or as events occur. Through the event reporting process, the basis for determining an overall performance level is being established.

## **D. Rating the Factors**

Each factor that is applicable to an employee's job is to be rated. The basis for the rating will be standards for performing the job established by the department head/supervisor. For example, in rating "Work Habits", the supervisor uses the factors under this category to measure how well an employee is meeting the work standards established: What is expected and the amount of supervision required; safety; adherence to orders; care of equipment; and so forth.

Factors are to be rated in accordance with the following guidelines:

**SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE.** Employee always exceeds established performance standards; self-motivated and creative; team oriented; works cooperatively with the public and co-workers; presents a positive image of the County; excellent working knowledge of regulations regarding County government; organized and thorough researching and analyzing situations and recommending the best solution; sets and accomplishes goals well beyond what is expected of classification; seeks employment growth and development through training and educational opportunities and is dedicated to the County and its operations.

**ABOVE EXPECTED PERFORMANCE.** Employee's performance usually and considerably exceeds standards established for the factor; performance related to factors exceed that normally expected of an employee in the classification and may equal or exceed the level of responsibility expected of an employee in a higher classification; performs unusual or special assignments associated with the factor; regular supervision is rarely required, even for non-routine tasks.

**EXPECTED PERFORMANCE.** The employee usually performs as expected within the standards established for a factor. Routine assignments are completed with regular supervision. Most employees perform factors at this level.

**PERFORMANCE NEEDS IMPROVEMENT.** The factors are performed below the expected level regularly; performance for the factors are minimal in both quality and amount of work; closer and specific supervision is required more than for other employees in the same classification or performing similar work.

**UNACCEPTABLE PERFORMANCE.** Performance rarely if ever reaches an expected level; excessive errors; lack of judgment; excessive supervision is required.

## **E. Documentation**

The Alexander County Performance Evaluation is a two-level system consisting of the Performance Factor Ratings **and** documentation. The Overall Performance Rating must coincide with the results of the ratings and the documentation accumulated during the evaluation year. Internal documentation refers to Event Reporting Forms generated within Alexander County Government. External documentation refers to approved documentation generated outside of Alexander County government such as letters from the public or other government officials, certifications, awards, etc. An Overall Performance Rating cannot be justified if it does not meet **both** requirements of Performance Ratings and documentation. Section F outlines the requirements for Overall Performance Ratings.

## **F. Overall Performance Ratings**

Based upon the ratings of individual factors and documentation, an employee's overall performance will be evaluated as follows:

**OVERALL SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE.** All performance factors should be rated at Above Expected or Superior, with the majority being Superior. In addition, there must be three or more positive event reporting forms filed during the evaluation period plus at least one form of external documentation. An employee in this category will be eligible for a merit pay increase or a merit bonus. There can be no negative event reporting forms filed during the evaluation year.

**OVERALL ABOVE EXPECTED PERFORMANCE.** All dimensions should be rated at the Above Expected or Expected level with the majority as Above Expected. At least two positive event reporting forms and/or external documentation noting above expected performance are required. An employee in this category will be eligible for a merit pay increase or a merit bonus. There can be no negative event reporting forms filed during the evaluation year.

**OVERALL EXPECTED PERFORMANCE.** There can be no more than 4 performance factors needing improvement. No additional documentation is required. An employee in this category will be viewed as a valuable asset to county government and will continue to receive all benefits afforded to county employees.

**OVERALL PERFORMANCE NEEDS IMPROVEMENT.** The evaluation notes at least 5 factors rated as needs improvement or unacceptable. An employee in this category will not be eligible to receive a merit increase and the rating will be considered Unsatisfactory Job Performance as described in the County Personnel Policy, Article IX. Another evaluation will take place in three (3) months. Without sufficient improvement, a job action may be taken. At least two negative event reporting forms and/or external documentation are required to support this category.

**OVERALL UNACCEPTABLE PERFORMANCE.** The evaluation results in the majority of factors rated as needs improvement or unacceptable. An overall rating of Unacceptable will be considered Grossly Inefficient Job Performance as outlined in the County Personnel Policy, Article IX. An employee whose overall performance rating falls in the Unacceptable area will not be eligible to receive a merit increase and will be subject to the disciplinary actions as outlined in Article IX, Section 6 of the Personnel Policy. At least three negative event reporting forms and at least one form of external documentation are required to support this category.

### **III. THE PERFORMANCE EVALUATION PROCESS**

#### **A. Who established the Performance Evaluation System?**

The Alexander County Board of Commissioners shall by policy establish the terms and conditions of performance evaluation. The Board may amend the system at its discretion and judgment.

#### **B. Who Shall be Evaluated?**

All persons hired by the County of Alexander to fill full-time or eligible part-time positions or those who are serving in a probationary status. All employees filling these positions shall be evaluated except those who are elected by the Citizens of Alexander County.

#### **C. Who Does the Evaluating?**

The evaluation process shall be completed by the employee's evaluating supervisor. Upon completion of the performance evaluation by the evaluating supervisor, the head of the department shall review the evaluation form.

When the Department Head is the evaluating supervisor, there shall be no reviewing authority at the departmental level. Department Heads shall be evaluated by the County Manager unless there is another appointing authority. In which case the County Manager will serve as personnel counsel to the appointing authority and as liaison between the appointing authority and the Board of County Commissioners.

#### **D. Who Administers the Program?**

The County Manager shall oversee the Performance Evaluation System and enforce the policy as adopted by the County Board of Commissioners.

The Personnel Officer shall be responsible for the administration of the program. The Personnel Office shall be the repository of all employee evaluation records.

The evaluation form with the Performance Evaluation Record completed, will be directed to the Department Head at the appropriate time.

### **E. Who has specific roles and responsibilities?**

1. Department Heads shall be responsible for having the evaluation form forwarded to the evaluating supervisors upon receipt. He/she will also be responsible for reviewing, signing and returning the completed form to the Personnel Office.

2. The evaluating supervisor shall be responsible for conducting the formal counseling session, completing the evaluation form, signing the form, having the employee sign the form and returning it to the Department Head within twenty (20) working days after receipt. The Department Head then has twenty (20) working days to review, sign and return the form to the Personnel Office. If there are more than two levels of supervisors within any given department, the appropriate flow of information through the chain of command will be determined by the Department Head. In cases where there is no evaluating supervisor, the department head shall evaluate.

3. When the completed form is returned to Personnel, the Personnel Officer is responsible for monitoring performance appraisal records and for verifying that the overall policy and procedure for rating performance is supported. Personnel will review all performance ratings for consistency across County departments. Any problems with performance appraisals will be reviewed with the department head and any performance records that are incomplete will be returned for modification or correction.

4. After the evaluation has been processed by Personnel, it is referred to the County Manager, or his designee, for review and approval/disapproval of pay increments. A "Personnel Action Form" form shall be completed by Personnel and distributed accordingly after approval by the County Manager.

5. The County Manager shall routinely report performance evaluation adjustments to the County Board of Commissioners.

### **F. When will employees be evaluated?**

Evaluation review dates are established as follows:

New Hires: End of probationary period and annually thereafter.

Regular Employees: Annually during months of December and January.

Evaluations shall be completed at least annually whether funding for merit increases is available or not. Individuals who have been promoted during the evaluation period and have received an increase in grade and or step, other than an across-the-board cost of living increase, will not be eligible for a merit increase until they have served in their new position for one year.

## **G. Merit Increase and Merit Bonus**

When there is available funding, any merit adjustment shall be authorized according to the following criteria: (One step equals 2.5%)

"Overall Superior" may receive more than a one step increase or a merit bonus.

"Overall Above Expected" may receive up to a one step increase or a merit bonus.

"Overall Expected" will not receive an increase.

"Overall Performance Needs Improvement" shall not receive an increase; however, another evaluation shall be scheduled in three (3) months. The follow-up evaluation will not result in a merit increase but is intended to allow the employee the opportunity to improve to a minimum performance rating of "Overall Expected."

"Overall Unacceptable" shall not receive any merit increase and may be subject to disciplinary action.

Employees who are at the maximum of the salary range for their position classification are not eligible to be considered for a merit increase. Employees who are at the maximum of the salary range for their position classification are eligible to be considered for a merit bonus at their regular performance evaluation time.

Merit bonuses shall be awarded based upon the performance of the employee as described in the performance evaluation. Merit bonuses do not become part of base pay and shall be awarded in a lump sum payment.

Merit increases would be effective the first bi-weekly pay period on or after the first of the month following the review date. Merit bonuses will be paid during the three months following the evaluation period.

## **H. How will the form be processed?**

1. Employees who have achieved regular status will be evaluated annually.

If a regular status employee receives an overall evaluation of "unacceptable", he/she must be immediately notified in writing by the Department Head as outlined in the county personnel policy. A copy of the notification letter must be sent to the Personnel Office for inclusion in the employee's personnel file.

Other personnel actions (e.g. demotion, transfer or termination) may be recommended by the Department Head, if deemed appropriate, in accordance with normal policies and procedures.

2. Employees on probation will be evaluated as follows.

The six (6) months evaluation will assist in determining if the employee should be placed in regular employment status. Receipt of an "overall expected" performance evaluation shall be considered a recommendation to place the employee in regular employment status.

If the six (6) months evaluation is below the "expected" level, the employee must be immediately notified in writing by the Department Head, that his/her job performance fails to meet performance standards. A copy shall be forwarded to the Personnel Office.

Ongoing communication should indicate potential cases of this nature, and appropriate letters of reprimand, opportunities for training, etc. should be in the employee's official personnel file. The Department Head may recommend that employment be terminated or that the probationary period be extended.

3. Prior to a supervisor leaving his/her current work unit, he/she must evaluate all employees who have not been evaluated in the last six (6) months. Appropriate forms shall be requested from Personnel by the Department Head to facilitate an orderly performance evaluation transition. These interim evaluation forms will be held by the Department Head during this transition period to be combined with the annual evaluation.

4. All completed evaluation forms will be reviewed by the Personnel Officer prior to placement in the employee's personnel file. If the performance evaluation does not appear congruent with other personnel actions included in the file, the respective Department Head will be contacted to determine if the evaluation is valid.

### **I. How are Supervisory Skills included in the Performance Evaluation System?**

The Supervisory Management Review Insert must be completed on all evaluating supervisors. In this section, comments must be made on goals accomplished during the evaluation period and goals and expectations must be set for the next evaluation period. Supervisory skills will be evaluated with events and comments being documented. This section is also open for any comments an evaluator would like to make which may not have been covered.

### **J. How is each performance evaluation approved and implemented?**

After the interview, the employee should add any comments he/she would like to make and sign the evaluation. The evaluating supervisor will then sign the evaluation and return it to the department head. The department head will review the form, sign and date, and forward to Personnel for processing. Personnel will review the form for com-

pleteness and adherence to policy and procedure. A "Personnel Action Form" will be attached to each evaluation form and then forwarded to the County Manager for review and/or approval. The County Manager will then return the forms to Personnel for implementation. Copies of the evaluation and the "Personnel Action Forms" will be returned to the department and the employee.

#### **K. What is the most critical part of the performance evaluation?**

The interview itself creates more anxiety and tension than any other part of the performance evaluation process. However, most employees will consider the formal evaluation interview to be of great importance since it concerns his/her performance and employment potential with the County. Consequently, it should be taken seriously by both the evaluating supervisor and employees.

The interview should be constructive, productive, and communicated clearly. This is the time to recognize and praise employees for a job well done, to be constructive in setting expectations, to talk about the events during the past evaluation period and set goals for the next period.

#### **IV. PERFORMANCE EVALUATION APPEAL**

The content of any specific performance evaluation is not subject to grievance unless the employee contends that he/she is the subject of discrimination or harassment.

When an employee believes that the evaluation is inaccurate and when the employee has sufficient documentation to question a performance rating, he/she is encouraged to informally discuss the perception with the evaluating supervisor and to seek a better understanding or satisfactory resolution.

The County's internal grievance procedure, as outlined in Article X of the Alexander County Personnel Policy, may be used to address the process of employee performance evaluation.

Please contact the Personnel Office for the proper steps to take to resolve any performance evaluation situation.