

Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) Process Guidelines for Unclassified Positions

Cooperative Extension's Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) process is a way to help unclassified employees** understand when their performance is out of alignment with the work expectations of their positions. With this knowledge these employees are in a better position to assume personal responsibility for improving their performance and to access available resources. At the heart of this process is a belief that every employee has potential and can be successful in their positions. This process also acknowledges that collaboration and communication are essential between all who are involved in supporting effective employee performance, while maintaining the appropriate level of confidentiality.

Performance is out of alignment with work expectations when there is unproductive, and/or disruptive on-the-job behavior that is not consistent with the purpose, focus, primary duties and responsibilities of a position as described in the position description. Awareness of this behavior may arise from ongoing comments, complaints or observations about a person's job-related behavior or performance. Unacceptable performance may also be observed as a single incident, depending on the situation.

Misconduct, which includes illegal behavior such as harassment or discrimination, is beyond the scope of this document. Allegations of harassment and discrimination are investigated by the University of Wisconsin- Extension and University of Wisconsin Colleges Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in collaboration with the appropriate Cooperative Extension administrative staff.

Performance deficiencies of particular concern can be grouped into four primary categories: 1) a pattern of behavior as indicated by more than an isolated comment or complaint about a person's job-related behavior or performance. Performance concerns may be expressed by county Extension oversight committees, program areas, program partners, clientele groups, office/team colleagues, etc.; 2) observed behavior (a single incident or a pattern over time) that is contributing to a hostile work environment; 3) unsuccessful tenured faculty review leading to a twelve-month remediation process; 4) lack of acceptable improvement in professional performance after feedback and coaching related to observed deficiencies.

**Employees in classified positions follow a performance improvement process as specified by union contract. Contact UW-Extension Human Resources for additional information.

Early Identification of Performance Deficiencies

Cooperative Extension staffs with administrative responsibilities have roles to play in remedying situations where individual performance is not in alignment with work expectations. A key role is giving constructive feedback. Giving constructive feedback is a skill that can be learned and developed. Refer to RBC Leadership Development Process-Module 2 on Coaching and Counseling for additional assistance in how to give constructive feedback effectively. When initial efforts to remedy performance deficiencies through coaching do not result in improved performance, staffs with administrative responsibilities also play key roles in creating and implementing a performance improvement plan.

Role and Expectations of the Individual

- Make good faith efforts to improve your performance based on the feedback provided.
- Follow-through with all requests to improve your performance in a timely manner.
- Continue performing your duties and responsibilities as outlined in your position description.
- Submit progress reports in a timely manner.
- Seek the support you need to be successful in improving your performance.

Role of the Administrative Lead in Identifying and Addressing Performance Deficiencies (County Department Head for county-based extension program positions; Nutrition Coordinator for county-based extension nutrition education positions; Unit Head for campus-based professional, technical, administrative positions)

- Identify performance deficiencies and give constructive feedback to the individual. Explain the scope and impact of the behavior. Offer support and refer to resources, e.g., employee assistance program counselor, as needed.
- Keep a record of the support given and the opportunities provided to the individual.
- Document performance deficiencies.
- Inform the appropriate administrator immediately rather than waiting to observe a pattern of deficiencies when a situation could potentially have significant ramifications for the individual, the office or Cooperative Extension.

Role of the Regional Director (for county-based positions) in Identifying and Addressing Performance Deficiencies

- Provide coaching on how to identify and address performance deficiencies to those individuals in an administrative lead role within the district.
- Intervene to address performance-related concerns when immediate remedial action is needed.
- Review the individual's performance overall in order to decide if a Performance Improvement Plan should be pursued.

Role of the Program Director in Identifying and Addressing Performance Deficiencies (when a county-based position, may be performed by Associate Program Director or Program Liaison)

- For faculty positions, lead three-year reviews and provide honest feedback (also one and two year reviews if conducted by the program area).
- Discuss identified programmatic concerns with staff member; communicate identified programmatic concerns to the Regional Director, Department Head or other Administrative Lead.
- Provide coaching to Unit Heads within the program area on how to identify and address performance deficiencies in their staff.

Role of the Academic Department in Identifying and Addressing Performance Deficiencies among Faculty Members

- Along with Program Directors, Regional Directors, Department Heads, and Mentors when appropriate, identify "needs improvement" faculty during peer reviews such as three-year reviews or tenured faculty reviews.

The Performance Improvement Process

(this process is put into effect when initial efforts to improve performance through constructive feedback, coaching, support and referral to resources has not resulted in the desired performance improvement)

Role and Expectations of the Individual while on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)

- Make good faith efforts to improve your performance based on the feedback provided.
- Follow-through with all requests to improve your performance in a timely manner.
- Continue performing your duties and responsibilities as outlined in your position description.
- Submit progress reports in a timely manner.
- Seek the support you need to be successful in improving your performance.
- Voluntarily withdraw self from consideration for awards.
- Consult with your administrative lead, hiring authority or supervisor before accepting leadership roles or other responsibilities beyond your primary position.

County-based Positions

Role and Expectations of the Regional Director:

- Represent the interests of the Dean and Director in seeking a remedy for an individual's documented performance deficiency.
- Assume the lead role in the person's Performance Improvement Process (PIP).
- Determine the best method for notifying the county partner about the PIP, in consultation with the county department head and other administrative staff, as needed. The method will likely vary from county to county depending on the extent to which the county oversight committee is involved in personnel matters, e.g., traditional contract counties may request to be more directly involved in the process.
- Lead the assessment of performance and face-to-face conversations with the individual.
- Initiate all correspondence to the individual related to the Performance Improvement Plan:
 - Inform the colleague of the need for the PIP and of the process that will be followed.
 - Outline the performance deficiencies, the steps or actions required to rectify the deficiencies and the timeline for the PIP, including possible consequences of continued poor performance.
- Conduct annual performance reviews while the individual is on a PIP.
- Honestly share performance status of the individual who is on a PIP when input is requested. For instance, if a letter of support is requested, the Regional Director should be straightforward within appropriate confidentiality parameters.
- Provide a copy of relevant communications when appropriate to: 1) those who are involved in implementing the PIP; 2) those who play a role in the evaluation of the faculty or academic staff member, including departmental committees and promotion review committees. Other committees such as association or institutional award committees should be made aware of the PIP status and the inappropriateness of award recognition while on a PIP.
- Take responsibility for informing the appropriate individuals when a decision is made to extend a PIP.
- Consult with the Cooperative Extension HRD Director and/or Associate Dean as needed to ensure proper human resource practices, policies, and laws are followed.

Role and Expectations of the Administrative Lead (County Department Head, Nutrition Coordinator)

- Provide observations and input into the development of the PIP.
- For county-based positions, assist the Regional Director in determining the most appropriate method for notifying the county partner.
- Provide support for the colleague as the PIP is being implemented.
- Observe the PIP's effectiveness in addressing documented performance deficiencies.
- Honestly share performance status of the individual who is on a PIP when input is requested.

Role and Expectations of the Program Director (may be performed by Program Director, Associate Program Director or Program Liaison)

- Provide input into the development of the PIP.
- Serve as a resource for identifying relevant UW-Extension and external professional development and skills training opportunities and means of support/resources for addressing identified deficiencies.
- Provide coaching to address identified deficiencies.
- Provide coaching, review and feedback in the development of plans of work, assessment instruments, performance feedback instruments, and reports.
- Provide feedback as part of a formal performance review.
- Provide regular updates on performance improvement efforts led by the program area.
- Honestly share performance status of the individual who is on a PIP when input is requested.

Role and Expectations of Academic Department Chair/Department or their designee (for faculty positions)

- Participate in coaching meetings with faculty member.
- If requested, participate in meetings to discuss the PIP status of the faculty member.
- Help faculty members understand the importance of the performance improvement process.
- Provide support to the colleague as requested.
- Reassess leadership roles in the department for an individual on a PIP.
- Reconsider individuals on a PIP when their name is recommended for department awards or recognition.
- Encourage departmental committees engaged in evaluating faculty and faculty promotions to fully consider the PIP status of the individual.

Campus-based Positions

Role and Expectations of Program Director or Unit Head (for professional, technical or administrative positions)

- Represent the interests of the Dean and Director in seeking a remedy for an individual's documented performance deficiency.
- Assume the lead role in the person's performance improvement process.
- Lead the assessment of performance and face-to-face conversations with the employee.
- Initiate all correspondence to the individual related to the Performance Improvement Plan:
 - Inform the individual of the need for the PIP and of the process that will be followed.
 - Outline the performance deficiencies, the steps or actions required to rectify the deficiencies and the timeline for the PIP, including possible consequences of continued poor performance.
- Conduct annual performance reviews while the individual is on a PIP.
- Honestly share performance status of the individual who is on a PIP when input is requested. For instance, if a letter of support is requested, the feedback should be straightforward within appropriate confidentiality parameters.
- Provide a copy of relevant communications when appropriate to: 1) those who are involved in implementing the PIP; 2) those who play a role in the evaluation of the faculty or academic staff member, including departmental committees and promotion review committees. Other committees such as association or institutional award committees should be made aware of the PIP status and the inappropriateness of award recognition while on a PIP.
- Take responsibility for informing the appropriate individuals when a decision is made to extend a PIP.
- Consult with the Cooperative Extension HRD Director and/or Associate Dean as needed to ensure proper human resource practices, policies, and laws are followed.

Steps Involved in Creating and Implementing Performance Improvement Plans

(led by the Regional Director, Program Director or Unit Head)

Background Information

A position description is used to document the primary job functions of each Extension position. For many positions, a competency assessment tool <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/nco/competencies.cfm> can be used to help identify gaps in knowledge and skills that can be addressed through professional development activities. These two documents are used as source documents for position expectations when creating a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP).

1. Document performance deficiencies:

- Document observations or reports of job-related problematic behavior related to the identified performance deficiency. Include the following in the documentation:
 - What, when, by whom, to whom, others who witnessed or observed the behavior, impact.
 - Other observations, sources of information, what you did about the situation.

2. Make the decision to implement a PIP:

- This decision is a collaborative one among all the colleagues involved in supporting an individual's successful performance. It is made only after efforts to address performance deficiencies through constructive feedback, coaching, support and referral to resources has not sufficiently improved performance. It is important to include the individual in the decision-making process, at an appropriate point, depending on the situation.

3. Create a PIP document that includes the following components:

- Describe the cause or nature of the problem/concern.
- Describe the actions that are to be taken to improve the performance deficiency, including holding regular meetings to review performance.
- Describe the measures by which performance will be evaluated in the future.
- Describe the timeline for performance improvement and the kind and frequency of follow-up that will be provided. (Follow-up at least every six months is recommended.)
- Describe the consequences of a failure to improve performance, choosing those options that are applicable from the following list:
 - Ineligibility for salary adjustment via pay plan. (applicable to **all** individuals on PIP's)
 - Continuation of the Performance Improvement Plan.
 - Inability to participate in some forms of professional development without prior approval.
 - Restrictions on specialized work assignments, such as participation on region and state teams, committee appointments or institutional leadership roles.
 - Suspension from position without pay.
 - Reassignment to other responsibilities (may not be located in the same geographic area).
 - Counseling to seek other employment.
 - Non-renewal of appointment contract.
 - Dismissal for cause; termination.

4. Meet with the individual to implement the PIP and to walk through the components of the PIP document.

5. Give constructive feedback on performance while a PIP is in effect:

- Regularly meet with the individual so he or she is aware of their behavior relative to the performance improvement plan.
- Allow the individual to have an opportunity to share his or her perceptions on their PIP progress. Be fair and open-minded.
- Ask the colleague about any support that is needed to be more successful.
- Use active listening techniques to be sure you understand the individual, e.g., "What I hear you saying is..."
- Refer to Module 2 in the RBC Leadership Development Process on Coaching and Counseling for additional assistance on how to give constructive feedback.

6. Provide Follow-up:

- Follow-up each conversation related to performance deficiencies with a written letter and include the following:
 - Restate the issues of concern.
 - Review (or present) the specific remedies for the concerns.
 - Discuss options available or to be pursued as consequences of performance and cite the specific ones to be used (if has been determined).
 - Review the timeline for visits and activities to be completed by the individual under review. Set next date or approximate date for check-in. Checking in at least every six months is recommended.
- Communicate the PIP status, as appropriate, to those involved in implementing the PIP and anyone who may be involved in evaluation of the individual, e.g., academic department chair, academic staff promotion review committee, association or institutional award committees, etc.

7. Initiate Performance Improvement Plan Consequences:

- Immediately inform the Office of Budget and Fiscal Operations that the individual is working under a Performance Improvement Plan and is not eligible for a pay plan increase.
- Determine steps needed to implement the consequences that were agreed upon and implement them.

8. Conclude the Performance Improvement Plan

- Initiate a communication with those involved in carrying out the Performance Improvement Plan to determine if performance deficiencies have been sufficiently improved. Ask for input by a designated point in time.
- If the input received by the due date supports ending the PIP, inform the individual and those who are involved in supporting and evaluating his or her performance of the decision to end the Performance Improvement plan (including academic department chairs for faculty positions).

- If input received does not indicate sufficiently improved performance, initiate discussion regarding the most appropriate next steps. Possible options include extending the PIP or, in the case of probationary faculty or academic staff, deciding to issue a non-renewal notice. (see *Unclassified Personnel Guidelines (UPG) #3 and #8*) for information on required notice of non-renewal deadlines.)
- Ensure that the appropriate documentation is included in the individual's permanent personnel records.