

Handbook Highlight from the Montana Municipal Officials Handbook

3.6 Performance Evaluation

LGC Note: Greetings. April and May are common months when performance evaluations are completed in preparation for budgeting and a new fiscal year. This part of the Handbook covers performance evaluation and provides a link to MMIA's personnel management resource web page. There you'll find some sample evaluation forms and sample self-evaluation forms.

3.601 Performance Evaluation Defined

An on-going performance evaluation allows for direct communication of performance issues, identifies areas for employee development and training, and can serve as a motivating event for employees to continue excellent performance or to enhance their performance. Feedback given to the employer during evaluation can help to identify organizational problems. The evaluation session provides documentation to support other management decisions including corrective action and discipline and ensures that job/position descriptions are up to date and accurate.

3.602 Conducting Performance Evaluation – Supervisor Guidelines

- Establish the right atmosphere. Find a private place where interruptions and phone calls are unlikely. Consider seating arrangements. Two comfortable chairs at a conference table are better than sitting behind the desk with the employee in front of the evaluator.
- Choose the right time. Look at your work schedule as well as the employee's. While mid-morning is often considered an ideal time, Fridays can be bad days if you are dealing with a marginal performer. Select a time other than lunch as the participants will be able to focus on the appraisal rather than the distraction of the meal and the server.
- Be in the right frame of mind. Don't attempt to conduct an appraisal

session if you are not feeling well or if the staff person is not well. Both of you need to be prepared mentally for the session.

- Set the agenda, having the self-appraisal, planning calendar and appraisals from others in place.
- Review position description with employee in advance of evaluation with particular emphasis on the performance evaluation factors included in the description.
- Make continuous observations during the year with written notation, dating and describing important examples of good and poor performance.
- Evaluate each performance factor independently of all other factors.
- Emphasize good performance and be specific about any unsatisfactory performance. The performance evaluation should be friendly but formal.
- If unsatisfactory performance is noted, specify the expected corrective actions and set near term follow up. Do this until the performance improves.
- Emphasize that an unsatisfactory rating is your appraisal of job performance, not of the person.
- Brief your supervisor on the strong and weak performance evaluations of those employees you supervise.
- Beware of "Halo and Horns" effect – a general impression colors the rating on all factors. Treat each factor separately.
- Beware of the "Recency" effect – that the evaluation is based upon the last three or four weeks of performance rather than the totality of the evaluation period.
- Beware of "Central Tendency" – this is fence straddling by an evaluator who is unwilling to assign appropriate high or low ratings.
- Beware of "Rater Bias" – personal prejudice against the employee.

3.603 Providing Feedback – Supervisor Guidelines

Performance feedback needs to be constructive in order for it to be productive. Sometimes employees just don't measure up to the city/town's performance standards. Some managers try to avoid this experience. They hope the employee's performance will improve with time, experience, or just luck

although the result is often just the opposite. Employees conclude that their performance is acceptable and no one tells them differently until they are fired (worst case scenario). In a case like that, a successful wrongful discharge claim could be filed because appraisals didn't reflect the actual performance. Feedback can reinforce the positive and change the negative by:

- Identifying specific actions or behaviors that were done well or poorly.
- Explaining the effects of the observed behavior, whether positive or negative.
- Focusing the feedback on the behavior, and not the person.
- Avoiding attacks or judgments on the individual.
- Encouraging the employee to listen rather than be defensive.
- Letting the employee know what behavior is expected and how inadequate behavior should be changed.
- Taking time to point out positive behaviors that can be repeated and working with the employee to come up with ways to repeat those behaviors.
- Following up with more feedback and action plans as needed.

3.604 Administration

- An employee's signature on the evaluation form does not imply agreement with the evaluation, only that the employee has participated in the evaluation.
- Written memoranda documenting performance throughout the year should be attached to the evaluation report.
- Performance appraisals should be signed by the supervisor.
- The signed report and the employee's comments and other documents must be filed in the employee's personnel folder and stored in a secure place not readily accessible by employees.
- The personnel file should be made available to the employee upon request but under controlled circumstances to prevent loss of critical documentation.

3.605 Performance Evaluation Resources

Montana Municipal Interlocal Authority
