



PERSONNEL AND
READINESS

UNDER SECRETARY OF WAR
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MAR 10 2026

MEMORANDUM FOR SENIOR PENTAGON LEADERSHIP
COMMANDERS OF THE COMBATANT COMMANDS
DEFENSE AGENCY AND DOD FIELD ACTIVITY DIRECTORS

SUBJECT: Transitioning the Defense Performance Management and Appraisal Program Appraisal Cycle to Align with the Fiscal Year and Immediate Requirements for “Level 5 – Outstanding” Critical Element Ratings

- References:
- (a) Acting Director, U.S. Office of Personnel Management Memorandum, “Performance Management for Federal Employees,” June 17, 2025
 - (b) Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness Memorandum, “Implementation of the Mandatory Supervisory Critical Element, ‘Holding Employees Accountable,’” September 15, 2025
 - (c) Department of Defense Instruction 1400.25, Volume 431, “DoD Civilian Personnel Management System: Performance Management and Appraisal Program,” February 4, 2016, as amended

The Office of Personnel Management issued reference (a) to standardize performance management throughout the Federal Government, as well as drive a high-performance and high-accountability culture throughout the Federal workforce. Consistent with reference (b), all supervisory performance plans in the Department were updated to include a Mandatory Supervisory Critical Element – *Holding Employees Accountable*. To continue implementation of references (a) and (b), this memorandum will: (1) provide guidance on managing the current and subsequent Defense Performance Management and Appraisal Program (DPMAP) appraisal cycles; and (2) require higher-level reviewer (HLR) approval for all critical elements rated “Level 5 - Outstanding.”

DPMAP Appraisal Cycle Requirements

To successfully transition to the Fiscal Year (FY) appraisal cycle required by reference (a), employees covered by the DPMAP must:

- Complete the standard DPMAP appraisal cycle beginning April 1, 2025 through March 31, 2026, with a rating of record effective date of June 1, 2026.
 - Only one documented progress review is required for the current 2025/2026 DPMAP appraisal cycle.
 - Rating-based (RB) monetary awards may be given for the April 1, 2025 through March 31, 2026, appraisal cycle using FY 2026 dollars; awards should be

effective after the rating of record effective date (June 1, 2026) but before September 30, 2026.

- Complete a shortened 6-month appraisal cycle beginning April 1, 2026 through September 30, 2026, with a rating of record effective date of December 1, 2026.
 - RB monetary awards may be given for this shortened appraisal cycle using FY 2027 dollars, subject to the availability of funds; awards should be effective after the rating of record effective date (December 1, 2026).
 - Performance Plans for the appraisal cycle starting April 1, 2026 must contain performance standards that distinguish between each performance level and continue to contain the mandatory supervisory critical element, “Holding Employees Accountable,” required by reference (a).
 - To begin aligning with reference (a), starting with the shortened cycle commencing April 1, 2026, progress reviews will be completed **quarterly**. Due to its shortened timeframe, there will only be one documented progress review.
 - DoW Components will prepare operational guidance to ensure employee performance plans and ratings address the shortened timeframe of this 6-month appraisal cycle.
- The transition to the FY appraisal cycle starting October 1, 2026 will incorporate all requirements set forth by reference (c).
- DoW academic institutions currently operating under a non-standard DPMAP appraisal cycle are required to transition employees covered by DPMAP to the FY appraisal cycle starting October 1, 2026.

Justification and Approval Requirement for Level 5 – Outstanding Critical Element Ratings

Section 3.5.a.(2)(b) of reference (b) requires performance narratives for each element rated “Outstanding” and “Unacceptable.” To facilitate implementation of reference (a), I direct a temporary exception to policy in reference (c) for the FY 2026 appraisal cycle to include the additional requirement of HLR approval for any “Outstanding” rating.

The Deputy Assistant Secretary of War for Civilian Personnel Policy (DASW(CPP)) will incorporate these changes into reference (c) before the end of FY 2026. My point of contact is Mr. Michael A. Cogar, DASW(CPP), at (703) 571-9282 or michael.a.cogar3.civ@mail.mil.



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