

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To issue a change to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) policy regarding performance management systems.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook contains VA policy on performance management systems. The pages in this transmittal replace the corresponding page numbers in Parts I and II of VA Handbook 5013, dated April 15, 2002. These changes clarify procedures for performance rating grievances and appeals, and eliminate Appendix F to Part I of the handbook by merging Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Executive Career Field (ECF) policy contained in that appendix with applicable sections in Part I. The changes will be incorporated into the electronic version of the VA Handbook 5013 that is maintained on the [Office of Human Resources Management Web site](#).
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Employee Relations and Performance Management Service (051), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management.
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VA Directive 5013, "Performance Management Systems."
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** None.

CERTIFIED BY:

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

/s/Robert T. Howard
Assistant Secretary for the
Office of Information and Technology

/s/Paul J. Hutter
Executive in Charge of the Office of
Human Resources and Administration

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

PART I. TITLE 5 PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL PROGRAM

CONTENTS

PARAGRAPH	PAGE
1. <u>COVERAGE</u>	I-1
2. <u>EXCLUSIONS</u>	I-1
3. <u>GENERAL PROVISIONS</u>	I-2
4. <u>EVALUATION</u>	I-2
5. <u>DEFINITIONS</u>	I-2
6. <u>PLANNING PERFORMANCE</u>	I-3a
7. <u>MONITORING PERFORMANCE</u>	I-3c
8. <u>APPRAISING PERFORMANCE</u>	I-3c
9. <u>PROCEDURES FOR DETAILS, TRANSFERS AND OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES</u>	I-4
10. <u>REWARDING PERFORMANCE</u>	I-5
11. <u>GRIEVANCES AND APPEALS</u>	I-6
12. <u>WITHIN-GRADE INCREASES – GENERAL SCHEDULE</u>	I-7
13. <u>WITHIN-GRADE INCREASES – PREVAILING RATE</u>	I-14
14. <u>FAILURE TO COMPLETE A SUPERVISORY PROBATIONARY PERIOD SATISFACTORILY</u>	I-15
15. <u>RECONSIDERATION REQUESTS [FOR AN EMPLOYEE BEING RETURNED TO A NON-SUPERVISORY/NON-MANAGERIAL POSITION]</u>	I-17
16. <u>ADVERSE ACTIONS</u>	I-18
17. <u>[APPEALING PERFORMANCE-BASED ACTIONS]</u>	I-18

APPENDICES

I-A. <u>PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL SYSTEM APPROVED BY OPM</u>	I-A-1
I-B. <u>OPM APPROVAL OF VA PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL SYSTEM</u>	I-B-1
I-C. <u>SAMPLE PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN</u>	I-C-1
I-D. <u>APPRAISAL PROGRAM FOR VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS</u>	I-D-1
I-E. <u>VBA NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR COMMON MANAGERIAL ELEMENTS</u>	I-E-1
[]	

PART I. TITLE 5 PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL PROGRAM

1. COVERAGE. This part applies to the process used to appraise the performance of the following Department of Veterans Affairs employees: [(NOTE: This policy applies to bargaining unit employees, unless negotiated provisions in National Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding provide otherwise):]

- a. General Schedule employees, including employees covered by the Performance Management and Recognition System Termination Act of 1993.
- b. Federal Wage System employees.
- c. Scientific and Technical (Senior Level) employees paid under 5 U.S.C. 5376.
- d. Full-time, part-time and intermittent hybrid Title 38 employees appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7401(3) or 7405(a)(1)(B).
- e. Veterans Canteen Service employees appointed under 38 U.S.C., chapter 78.
- f. Temporary and Term employees, except as specifically excluded.

[g. All Veterans Health Administration (VHA) employees under the VHA Performance Appraisal Program, except that Title 38 employees under that program are covered by provisions in Part II of this handbook for the purposes of counseling and poor performance.]

2. EXCLUSIONS. This part excludes the following:

- a. Officers appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, or by the President alone, to positions for which rates of basic compensation may exceed the maximum rate provided in the General Schedule.
- b. Employees in the Senior Executive Service.
- c. Full-time, part-time, and intermittent physicians, dentists, chiropractors, nurses, nurse anesthetists, optometrists, podiatrists, physician assistants, expanded-function dental auxiliaries appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7401(1), 7405(a)(1)(A), or 7406, and individuals appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7306 in the Office of the Under Secretary for Health.
- d. Non-U.S. citizens employed at the VA Regional Office, Manila, Republic of the Philippines, who are paid according to local prevailing wage rates.
- e. Temporary employees in the excepted service for which employment is not reasonably expected to exceed 90 days in a 12-month period.
- f. Members of the Board of Veterans' Appeals and the Board of Contract Appeals.

3. GENERAL PROVISIONS

a. Performance will be rated for each element as Exceptional, Fully Successful, or Less Than Fully Successful, and at a summary level as Outstanding, Excellent, Fully Successful, Minimally Satisfactory, or Unsatisfactory, which correspond to Levels 1 through 5--Pattern H. (See VA Handbook 5013, Part I, Appendix A, subparagraph 5d.)

b. The results of the performance appraisal are used as the basis for granting within-grade and quality step increases, and for determining performance awards, as well as training, rewarding, reassigning, promoting, reducing in grade, retaining and removing employees.

c. The appraisal period is the one-year period that begins on October 1 and ends on September 30 unless otherwise designated by an Under Secretary, Assistant Secretary, or Other Key Official. In the case where a change in rating cycle is being made, notification will be issued establishing and defining an alternative appraisal cycle.

d. The performance management program for VBA non-executive directors is contained in VA Handbook 5013, Part I, Appendices D and E.

e. [Performance plans will be documented on VA Form 0750, Performance Appraisal Program or VA Form 3482e for employees covered by the VHA Performance Appraisal Program, as appropriate.]

4. EVALUATION. Administration Heads, Assistant Secretaries and Other Key Officials will periodically evaluate the effectiveness of performance [management] within their respective organizations. The Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management [] will analyze and evaluate the overall effectiveness of VA's performance appraisal program and recommend modifications as necessary.

5. DEFINITIONS

a. **Achievement Level.** The overall level of accomplishment for each element as measured against the pre-established performance standards. Achievement levels are defined as follows:

(1) **Exceptional.** All Fully Successful performance standards for the element are significantly surpassed. This level is reserved for employees whose performance in the element far exceeds normal expectations and results in significant contributions to the organization.

(2) **Fully Successful.** Performance standards for the particular element when taken as a whole are being met. This level is a positive indication of employee performance and means the employee is effectively meeting performance demands for this component of the job.

(3) **Less Than Fully Successful.** A level of performance that does not meet [a] standard[] established for the Fully Successful level. Assignment of this achievement level means that performance of the element is not acceptable.

b. **Appraisal.** The process under which performance is reviewed and evaluated.

- c. **Appraisal Cycle.** The specific dates that mark the beginning and ending of an appraisal period.
- d. **Appraisal Period.** The established period of time for which performance will be reviewed and a rating of record will be prepared.
- e. **Approval Official.** The designated official at a higher management level than the Rater who reviews and approves [at least] all Minimally Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory ratings at the end of the appraisal period. Organizations may decide [to have some or all] ratings [above Minimally Satisfactory] subject to review by Approval Officials. The Secretary and the Inspector General are the only officials who can serve as both the Rater and Approval Official.
- f. **Days.** Calendar days, unless otherwise specified.
- g. **Element.** A component of a position sufficiently important to warrant appraisal. The element may be either critical or noncritical and is defined as follows:
- (1) **Critical Element.** Any element that contributes toward the accomplishment of organizational goals and objectives, and is of such importance that Less Than Fully Successful performance of it would result in unacceptable performance in the position.
 - (2) **Noncritical Element.** Any element that does not meet the definition of critical element but is still of sufficient importance to warrant written appraisal.
- [NOTE: The term “noncritical” does not imply that the goals and/or functions described in these elements are of an unimportant nature. The makers of policy for the VHA Performance Appraisal Program would prefer to refer to these elements as “other elements.”]
- (3) **Additional Element.** A dimension or aspect of individual, team or organizational performance that is not used in assigning a summary level but, like critical and noncritical elements, is useful for purposes such as communicating performance expectations and serving as the basis for granting awards. Such elements could be used as a means of communicating expected performance where the performance threshold is beyond the employee’s immediate control in areas such as attainment of organizational goals, work plans, work objectives or program plans. []
- h. **Minimum Appraisal Period.** The 90-day period during which an employee must have performed under communicated performance elements and standards that may result in a performance rating.
- i. **Performance Plan.** All written or otherwise recorded critical[,] noncritical [and additional] performance elements and standards that identify expected performance.
- j. **Performance Standard.** The management approved expression of the performance threshold(s), requirement(s) or expectation(s) that must be met to be appraised at a particular level of performance. A performance standard may include, but is not limited to, factors such as quality, quantity, timeliness and manner of performance. They [shall] also include specific recurring and nonrecurring goals, program plans, priority programs, etc., since accomplishment of organizational objectives should be reflected in performance plans when appropriate.

k. **Progress Review.** Communication with employees, at least once during the appraisal period, about their performance.

l. **Rater.** The official, usually the immediate supervisor, who is] responsible for developing performance plans, providing feedback and progress reviews, appraising employee performance, and recommending a performance rating.

m. **Rating of Record.** The performance rating prepared at the end of an appraisal period for performance over the entire period and the assignment of a summary level. This constitutes the official rating of record.

n. **Summary Rating.** The record of the appraisal of [all] critical [and noncritical] element[s] and the assignment of an overall rating. Ratings will be assigned in accordance with the following criteria:

(1) **Outstanding.** The achievement levels for all elements are designated as Exceptional.

(2) **Excellent.** The achievement levels for all critical elements are designated as Exceptional. Achievement levels for noncritical elements are designated as at least Fully Successful. Some, but not all, noncritical elements may be designated as Exceptional.

(3) **Fully Successful.** The achievement level for at least one critical element is designated as Fully Successful. Achievement levels for other critical and noncritical elements are designated as at least Fully Successful or higher.

(4) **Minimally Satisfactory.** The achievement levels for all critical elements are designated as at least Fully Successful. However, the achievement level(s) for one (or more) noncritical element(s) is (are) designated as Less Than Fully Successful.

(5) **Unsatisfactory.** The achievement level(s) for one (or more) critical elements is (are) designated as Less Than Fully Successful.

6. PLANNING PERFORMANCE

a. A performance plan will be developed to measure the performance requirements of each employee's position.

(1) Solicitation of input from employees and employee representatives in the development and revision of performance plans is encouraged.

(2) Performance plan input may be sought from multiple sources, including customers, peers and others involved in the supervision of the employee.

(3) Performance plans [shall] be established in conjunction with the creation of and classification of new positions.

- (4) Each performance plan must include all elements that will be used in assigning a summary level.
- b. Performance plans must contain at least one critical element [and one non-critical element] that address individual performance.
 - c. Performance plans may include additional elements.
 - d. Performance plans must support organizational goals and objectives and be linked to overall program results.
 - e. Performance plans must include standard(s) that address customer service.
 - f. Performance standards are required to be written only at the Fully Successful achievement level.
 - g. Performance standards [must] be understandable, challenging, realistic and attainable, and sufficient to permit accurate measurement of the employee's performance. They [shall] be expressed in terms that promote an understanding of how the employee's individual performance links to organizational and/or strategic goals.
 - h. While standards must, to the maximum extent possible, permit appraisals purely on the basis of objective criteria, they are not intended to replace supervisory judgment. A standard [shall] be sufficiently precise and specific so as to invoke a general consensus as to the meaning and content; however, there is no requirement that standards contain numerical measurements. Raters [shall] also consider the quality of work, efficiency, productivity, timeliness, and the accomplishment of goals as viable performance measures.
 - i. The appraisal process consists of assigning one achievement level for each element. Supervisors may give added weight to some performance standards versus others. Employees shall be made aware of weighting differences up front.
 - j. When a performance plan needs to be changed during the appraisal period due to changes in work assignments, achievement of group or team objectives, or other circumstances that render standards inappropriate, the employee and employee representative [shall] be involved in revising and/or redefining element(s) and standard(s) [by providing input for consideration as appropriate].
 - k. Raters will ensure each employee receives a performance plan each rating cycle and will obtain the employee's signature verifying receipt [as soon as practical, but not later than] 60 days from either the beginning of the appraisal period, appointment to a new position or when a performance plan is changed.
 - l. Each Rater will use VA Form 0750 [or VA Form 3482e, as appropriate] for documenting the approved performance plan. Additional documentation may be attached to the form.

7. MONITORING PERFORMANCE

a. The minimum appraisal period is 90 calendar days under a performance plan.

b. Each employee must receive and have documented at least one progress review during the appraisal period. This progress review will be documented on VA Form 0750 [or VA Form 3482e, as appropriate]. Additional informal communication about an employee's progress in meeting performance standards is encouraged and may be conducted as appropriate.

c. Employees whose performance is Less Than Fully Successful in one or more critical elements must be notified in writing and be given a reasonable opportunity to improve their performance to the Fully Successful level. See VA Handbook 5013, Part I, Appendix C for a sample performance improvement plan.

(1) Employees who improve their performance to the Fully Successful level during the opportunity period must sustain Fully Successful performance for 1 year in the critical element(s) on which they were provided an opportunity to improve. The 1-year time period starts from the beginning of their opportunity period. If, during that 1-year period, the employee's performance become Less Than Fully Successful again in the same critical elements, a performance-based adverse action may be proposed without the benefit of an additional opportunity to improve.

(2) Unless reassigned, employees whose performance is determined Unacceptable at the conclusion of the opportunity period [may] be reduced in grade or removed. Sample letters may be found in VA Handbook 5021, Employee/Management Relations.

8. APPRAISING PERFORMANCE

a. Employees will be appraised at the end of the appraisal period using VA Form 0750 or [VA Form 3482e, as appropriate].

b. Raters [must] consider improvements in efficiency, productivity, timeliness, quality of work or service, accomplishment of goals, as well as any other relevant information in appraising performance. [They shall also consider feedback from multiple sources, including customers, peers or other appropriate sources, and encourage employees to keep records and notes related to their accomplishments during the appraisal period for the purpose of submitting] voluntary self-assessment[s] that will be considered in developing rating[s].

c. Employees must receive a written or otherwise recorded rating of record no later than 60 days following the end of the appraisal period.

d. Performance may be determined to be at [levels other than Fully Successful] even though standards are not established at [those] level[s].

[e.] Within 10 workdays after the conclusion of the appraisal period, employees may submit to the Rater a self-assessment or other information related to their performance during the appraisal period. Such information will generally relate to the established performance plan. The Rater will consider this information, if submitted, and all other information relevant to the employee's performance that is available and assign one achievement level for each element.

[f.] An achievement level must be assigned for each critical and noncritical element of the performance plan on which the employee has had a chance to perform. If an employee submits a self-assessment and the Rater can verify its accuracy and completeness, the self-assessment can be used as the justification for an assigned rating. Otherwise, if an achievement level other than Fully Successful is assigned, specific examples supporting that level must be documented in the portion of the [rating form] provided for this purpose. When an achievement level of Fully Successful is assigned, a description or documentation of performance is not required.

[g.] Ratings of record will be assigned in accordance with the following criteria:

(1) **Outstanding.** The achievement levels for all elements are designated as Exceptional.

(2) **Excellent.** The achievement levels for all critical elements are designated as Exceptional. Achievement levels for noncritical elements are designated as at least Fully Successful. Some, but not all, noncritical elements may be designated as Exceptional.

(3) **Fully Successful.** The achievement level for at least one critical element is designated as Fully Successful. Achievement levels for other critical and noncritical elements are designated as at least Fully Successful or higher.

(4) **Minimally Satisfactory.** The achievement levels for all critical elements are designated as at least Fully Successful. However, the achievement level(s) for one (or more) noncritical element(s) is (are) designated as Less Than Fully Successful.

(5) **Unsatisfactory.** The achievement level(s) for one (or more) critical elements is (are) designated as Less Than Fully Successful.

[h.] Following the assignment of performance ratings, the Rater will forward all appraisal forms to the Approval Official. A list of all Fully Successful and above ratings and recommendations for performance awards [shall] be forwarded at the same time. Ratings and award recommendations will not be communicated to employees prior to final approval by the official with the authority to approve awards. The Approval Official will review all Unsatisfactory, Minimally Satisfactory and [other ratings as appropriate], and either concur with those ratings or assign a different rating. He/she may discuss with or request additional justification for the recommended performance rating from the Rater. If a different rating is assigned by the Approval Official, the performance-based reason for the change must be explained on the form. This explanation [shall] specify which achievement levels for which elements were changed and why. The appropriate ratings will be signed by the Approval Official and documented on [the rating form] no later than 4 weeks following completion of the appraisal period. This time requirement will be met if possible, but may be extended for mission critical reasons.

[i.] Within 5 weeks from the end of the rating period, the Approval Official is responsible for forwarding rating information and award recommendations on a VA Performance Management Certification Form, through appropriate channels, to the Performance Awards budget official. This time requirement may be extended for good reasons.

[j.] Approval Officials will be informed when the final review and approval process for ratings and awards has been completed and certified. At this point, the Approval Officials and Raters will ensure that all ratings documented on the original [rating form] are forwarded to the servicing Human Resources (HR) office and/or fiscal office for processing. The Approval Official is responsible for ensuring that the Rater provides the employee with a copy of the completed [rating form] no later than 60 days following the end of the appraisal period, and discusses the basis for the rating with the employee. If the employee is dissatisfied with the appraisal/rating, he/she may informally discuss the matter with the Rater and/or Approval Official. If still dissatisfied, the employee may formally grieve the rating [under the appropriate negotiated procedure, if applicable, or paragraph 11 of this part].

[k.] The servicing HR office will code approved performance ratings and awards into the PAID system as soon as possible but not later 90 days following the end of the rating period.

[l.] Performance under critical and noncritical elements will be used in deriving a summary level.

[m.] The performance appraisal and rating of a disabled veteran may not be lowered because the veteran has been absent from work to seek medical treatment as provided in Executive Order 5396.

[n. The method for deriving and assigning a summary level may not limit or require the use of particular summary levels.] Forced distribution of performance ratings is prohibited.

9. PROCEDURES FOR DETAILS, TRANSFERS AND OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES. The intent of the performance appraisal is to appraise an employee's performance covering an entire rating period. To do so, the following procedures will be used to assure continuity throughout the appraisal process:

a. **Employee Position Changes.** When an employee changes positions within VA, a performance (summary) rating will be prepared by the Rater, shared with the employee and forwarded to the servicing human resources office or to the gaining organization.

b. **Rater Leaves or Changes Positions.** Before a Rater leaves or changes positions, he/she will prepare a summary rating for each employee under his/her supervision, [provide a copy of the rating to his/her employees] and will forward the completed [rating form] to the servicing human resources office or higher level management official within the organization.

c. **Employee Transfers to Another Agency.** Before an employee transfers to another Federal agency, the Rater will complete a performance (summary) rating [] and forward it to the servicing human resources office for inclusion in the employee's Employee Performance File.

d. **Employee Not Under Performance Plan for Minimum Appraisal Period.** When an employee has not served under a performance plan for his/her position of record for 90 days by the end of the appraisal period because of a position change, career promotion, appointment or any other reason, either:

(1) The appraisal period will be extended to provide for the minimum appraisal period and a rating of record will be prepared at that time. The Rater may take into consideration any summary ratings provided by the employee's previous Rater(s) in determining the rating of record; or

(2) The Rater may utilize any performance rating prepared by a previous Rater as the rating of record by concurring with it.

e. **Employee Changes Performance Appraisal Programs in VHA.** When an employee changes performance appraisal programs in VHA, e.g., Executive Career Field (ECF), a performance (summary) rating will be prepared by the Rater, shared with employee and forwarded to the servicing human resources office.

f. **Rater Not in Position for Minimum Appraisal Period.** As long as sufficient information is available on which to appraise an employee's performance that covers a 90-day minimum period, there is no requirement that a Rater occupy his/her position for a specific length of time. However, if a performance rating is not available or is not sufficiently developed to permit an appraisal, the appraisal period will be extended to provide for performance under the Rater for the minimum appraisal period.

g. **Employee Detailed or Temporarily Promoted.** When an employee is detailed or temporarily promoted, a performance plan will be provided for the position to which he or she is detailed or promoted. If the detail or temporary promotion lasts for [120] days or more, a performance rating will be prepared at the conclusion of the detail or temporary promotion that appraises the employee's performance while in the temporary position. [A copy of] this rating [shall] be shared with the employee and then forwarded to the servicing human resources management office or employing organization for consideration at the end of the appraisal period. For employees temporarily assigned outside VA, every effort will be made to obtain similar information about the employee's performance.

h. **Employee Service on a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP).** Employees who have been given a notice of unacceptable performance and an opportunity to improve performance, will have their ratings of record postponed until the performance improvement period expires.

10. REWARDING PERFORMANCE. Eligibility for performance awards and quality step increases will be based on annual ratings of record. These awards are described in VA Handbook 5017, Employee Recognition and Awards.

a. Performance appraisal information will be considered in merit promotions, reassignments, or other placement actions, to the extent that performance elements are related to the knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics of the position being filled.

b. Performance appraisal information can assist in the identification of specific training needs that, if met, can improve and enhance employee work skills. It can also be used by supervisors in formulating individual development plans for their employees.

c. Annual performance ratings of record are one of several factors that determine retention standing in an employee's competitive level in reduction in force (RIF). (See 5 CFR 351.504.) Additional service

credit is granted for ratings of Fully Successful or better. Only ratings of record are creditable for the RIF process. Special ratings of record prepared in connection with an acceptable level of competence determination, and for other special circumstances, are not creditable for this purpose. No rating of record will be assigned for the sole purpose of affecting an employee's RIF retention standing (see 5 CFR 351.504).

11. [PERFORMANCE RATING] GRIEVANCES AND APPEALS. [These procedures apply to performance appraisals or overall ratings that are not covered by a negotiated grievance procedure.] An employee who is dissatisfied with [a performance appraisal or overall rating] may grieve the rating[, justification and/or elements at issue using this procedure] or [a] locally established alternative dispute resolution process. Negotiated grievance procedures are outlined in the grievance articles of appropriate collective bargaining agreements.

[**NOTE:** in order to reduce the administrative burden associated with the grievance process and to minimize the loss of staff productivity while participating in that process, *the utilization of existing ADR programs as a means to streamline appeals is highly encouraged.*]

a. **[Informal] Grievance Procedure []**

(1) [Consistent with the principle that grievances shall should be resolved at the lowest level possible, an employee who is dissatisfied with an assigned performance rating may grieve the rating and/or elements at issue to the Approval Official (if used), otherwise to the Rater, within 15 calendar days after receipt of the rating. The employee and the employee representative, if any, will be provided the opportunity to explain the grievance.

(2) After exploring the grievance, the official to whom the matter was grieved [shall] provide a written answer to the employee, through his/her representative, if any, within 10 calendar days. The response will include the decision on the grievance, supporting reasons and will include the employee's right to present a formal grievance].

[b.] **Formal Grievance Procedure**

[(1)] If the employee is not satisfied with the answer at the informal stage, within 10 calendar days from the receipt of the informal response, the employee may present the grievance in writing, through supervisory channels, to the management official at the next higher level in the organization.

[(a)] The formal grievance will contain the date of the performance rating, the elements at issue and the reasons for seeking reconsideration for each element at issue, the performance rating desired and the decision at the informal stage.

[(b)] A grievance file will be established that will contain a copy of the performance rating, a copy of the formal grievance, a copy of the informal decision and related documentation, and any additional information that is appropriate for consideration in making a decision based on the record[. Do not keep items in the file that would not be otherwise reviewable by the employee and/or the employee's representative].

[(2)] The grievance file will be forwarded to the [Approval O]fficial to consider the grievance for a decision based on the record. A written decision will be forwarded through channels to the employee, through his/her representative, if any, usually within 10 work days. [This is the final administrative appeal for performance appraisal disagreements.]

[(3)] If the performance rating or narrative justification on the appraisal is changed as a result of the decision, all official records and personnel actions (e.g., within grades) will be changed, as applicable, with the employee being notified.

[]

12. WITHIN-GRADE INCREASES – GENERAL SCHEDULE

a. Definitions

(1) **Acceptable Level of Competence.** Successful performance by an employee of the duties and responsibilities of his or her assigned position as evaluated against his or her performance plan which warrants advancement of the employee's rate of basic pay to the next higher step or the grade of his or her position, subject to the requirements in VA Handbook 5013, Part I, subparagraph 12.b(2).

(2) **Equivalent Increase.** Unless otherwise excepted, increase or increases in an employee's rate of basic pay equal to or greater than the difference between the rate of pay for the General Schedule grade and step rate occupied by an employee and the rate of pay for the next higher step rate of that grade.

(3) **Permanent Position.** A position filled by an employee whose appointment does not have a definite time limitation of 1 year or less. Permanent position includes competitive or excepted service term appointments of more than 1 year and positions to which employees are promoted on a temporary or term basis of at least 1 year [].

b. General Policies and Principles

(1) To be awarded a within-grade increase, an employee must meet all the following requirements established by 5 U.S.C. 5335:

(a) The employee must have completed the required waiting period of advancement to the next higher step rate of the grade of his or her position [];

(b) The employee must not have received an equivalent increase during the waiting period;

(c) The employee's performance of the duties and responsibilities of his or her assigned position must be at an acceptable level of competence. To be determined at an acceptable level of competence, the employee's most recent rating of record must be at least "Fully Successful." (See VA Handbook 5013, Part I, subparagraph 12c.)

2. The written decision will include specific responses to any other issues raised by the employee in connection with the reconsideration request.

3. The decision letter will inform the employee of his or her right to appeal (see g below).

(b) If a negative determination is overturned on reconsideration:

1. The decision letter will inform the employee of the basis for the decision.

2. If the negative determination was based on a special rating of record, all copies of the rating will be removed from official files and destroyed.

3. If the negative determination was consistent with the most recent annual rating of record, a special rating of record will be prepared to document the reconsideration decision and a copy will be given to the employee with the written decision.

4. The decision letter will inform the employee that the within-grade increase will be effective retroactive to the original due date.

5. The supervisor will prepare and forward [SF-52], Request for Personnel Action, to the servicing Human Resources Management Office for processing the within-grade increase.

g. Appeal of Reconsideration Decision

(1) If a negative determination is sustained after reconsideration, the employee, if not covered by a bargaining agreement, may appeal the decision to the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB). However, for an employee covered by a collective bargaining agreement, a reconsideration decision that sustains a negative determination is only reviewable in accordance with the terms of the agreement.

(2) For employees who may appeal to the MSPB, the following information must be included in the decision notice:

(a) Notice of the time limits for appeal to the MSPB (i.e., within [30] calendar days of receipt of the negative reconsideration decision) and the address of the appropriate MSPB office for filing the appeal (based on the employee's duty station at the time of the action);

(b) A copy of the MSPB regulations, 5 CFR, parts 1200 through 1261;

(c) A copy of the MSPB appeal form; and

(d) Notice of entitlement to request the voluntary expedited appeals procedures as described in the attachment to the appeal form

h. Continuing Evaluation After Withholding a Within-Grade Increase. When a within-grade increase has been withheld, it may be awarded whenever a subsequent rating of record (annual or special) indicates that the employee has demonstrated sustained performance at the successful level. Generally, a new determination will be made no sooner than 90 days from the original eligibility date of the within-grade increase. For as long as the within-grade continues to be denied, each subsequent progress review and annual rating of record will be considered to be a new determination and an appropriate notice will be prepared to inform the employee in accordance with paragraph d above. If the progress review indicates that the employee is performing at the successful level, a special rating of record must be prepared to support granting the within-grade increase. Any time the within-grade is subsequently granted, the supervisor must prepare [SF-52] and forward it to the servicing personnel office for processing. The effective date of the within-grade increase will be the first pay period on or after the last date of the performance period upon which the favorable determination is based.

13. WITHIN-GRADE INCREASES - PREVAILING RATE

a. Eligibility Criteria

(1) Employees covered by this paragraph will be advanced to the next higher rate of their grades at the beginning of the first applicable pay period following completion of the required waiting period, provided their performance is satisfactory and they have not received an equivalent increase in pay during their waiting period.

(2) Waiting periods, creditable service, equivalent increases and effective dates will be determined in accordance with VA Handbook 5007.

(3) An employee's performance is satisfactory when he or she achieves or maintains a performance rating of record of successful based on a performance plan established in accordance with paragraph 6.

b. General Procedures

(1) Raters will receive advance notice from the PAID system when a within-grade increase is due for an employee under their supervision.

(2) Determinations concerning whether a prevailing rate employee has achieved and maintained a performance rating of record of successful and should be advanced to the next higher step of his or her grade are similar to acceptable level of competence determinations for General Schedule employees. These determinations will, therefore, be made using the procedures established in 12c for acceptable level of competence determinations.

(3) Anytime a special rating of record is prepared to support a determination on a within-grade increase which is inconsistent with the last annual rating of record, the supervisor must prepare and forward [SF-52] to the servicing Human Resources Management Officer for processing.

(4) The notice of determination will be as provided in 12d.

(5) Prevailing rate employees may request reconsideration of a negative determination under the procedures established in 12e. The decision will be made in accordance with the procedures established in 12f.

(6) If a negative determination is sustained after reconsideration, the employee, if covered by a bargaining agreement, may grieve the decision under the negotiated procedure. If not covered by a bargaining agreement, the employee may grieve the decision under the agency grievance procedure in VA Handbook 5021.

c. Special Procedures for Probationary Employees. At least 1 month before the within-grade from step 1 to step 2 is due, the Rater [shall] review the performance of a probationary employee to assure that he or she is performing satisfactorily. If performance is not satisfactory and if employment is not being terminated before the within-grade increase is due, a special rating of record [shall] be prepared to document performance deficiencies. At least 2 weeks before the due date, [SF-52] will be prepared to withhold the within-grade increase and the special rating of record will be forwarded to the servicing human resources office for processing and filing. The employee will be given the SF 50-B, a copy of the special rating of record, and a written notice of the negative determination as provided in 12d(3).

d. Continuing Evaluation After Withholding a Within-Grade Increase. When a within-grade increase has been withheld, it may be awarded whenever a subsequent rating of record (annual or special) indicates that the employee has achieved and maintained performance at the successful level. New determinations will be made in accordance with 12h.

14. FAILURE TO COMPLETE A SUPERVISORY PROBATIONARY PERIOD SATISFACTORILY

(1) If, after a reasonable trial during the probationary period, the new supervisor's or manager's performance demonstrates supervisory or managerial deficiencies which make him or her unsuitable for continued employment in the position, action must be taken to remove the employee from the position. Such action [shall] be taken as soon as these facts become apparent and in sufficient time for the probationer to be notified and removed from the position before the probationary period expires.

(2) When an employee serving under both 5 CFR, part 315, subparts H and I, procedures fails to complete the subpart H probationary period satisfactorily, action must be taken to separate the person under the subpart H procedures.

(3) Employees who fail to complete the subpart I probationary period required under 5 U.S.C. 3321 and are returned to nonsupervisory or nonmanagerial positions of no lower grade and pay than that previously held before the supervisory or managerial assignment do not become entitled to grade and pay retention as a result of these placements. However, employees who entered a supervisory or managerial position with grade and/or pay retention due to a previous personnel action do not lose the retention as a result of failure to complete the probationary period. For example, an employee who formerly held a GS-13 position is placed through reduction-in-force (RIF) procedures in a GS-11 position with grade and pay retention. Three months later the employee is placed in a GS-12 supervisory position. After 6 months in the GS-12 position, the employee fails the probationary period and is placed in a GS-11 position. The employee is still entitled to the 15-month balance of his 2 years of GS-13 grade retention.

(4) RIF procedures will not be used for assigning affected probationary employees to other positions.

(5) The return of an employee to a nonsupervisory or nonmanagerial position is not a basis for denying the employee consideration for subsequent assignment to other such positions.

b. Initiating and Approving Officials. The decision to remove an employee from a supervisory or managerial position will be initiated by the employee's immediate supervisor and approved by the next higher level supervisor.

c. Assignment Rights

(1) A nonsupervisory or nonmanagerial employee who is demoted into a position for which probation is required and who, for reasons of supervisory or managerial performance, does not satisfactorily complete the probationary period is entitled to be assigned to a position at the same grade and pay as the position in which he or she was serving probation. Such employees may also be considered for positions at or above their supervisory/managerial grade level under merit promotion procedures.

(2) Employees not covered in preceding paragraphs who do not satisfactorily complete the probationary period are entitled to be placed in a properly classified nonmanagerial or nonsupervisory probationary position of no higher grade and pay than that held before entry into the supervisory or managerial position.

(3) Normally, field facility employees will be returned to positions at their current facilities; Central Office employees, to positions in their present administration or staff office. When there is no suitable placement at his/her current facility for an employee occupying a centralized position, the employee will be relocated, at government expense, to another facility. Receiving facilities will pay for the transfers to centralized positions; losing facilities, for transfers to noncentralized positions.

d. Notice to Employees

(1) The written employee notice must include the following:

(a) The position to which the employee is to be assigned;

(b) The authority, 5 CFR 315.907, for the assignment;

(c) The performance-based reason(s) for the assignment;

(d) A statement that the assignment is not grievable or appealable except for allegations of discrimination; and

(e) The employee's right to request reconsideration of the decision (see par. 15 below).

(2) As a general rule, the probationer will be given from 15 to 30 days advance notice. However, the assignment must be effected before the completion date of the 1-year probationary period.

e. **Effecting the Personnel Action.** An action to reassign or demote an employee for not satisfactorily completing the probationary period must be documented in accordance with the requirements in OPM's Guide to Processing Personnel Actions.

15. RECONSIDERATION REQUESTS [FOR AN EMPLOYEE BEING RETURNED TO A NONSUPERVISORY/NONMANAGERIAL POSITION]

a. An employee being returned to a nonmanagerial or nonsupervisory position may request a reconsideration, based on the record, of the decision, and a review of the decision, and a review of the return action. The reconsideration will be done by the next higher supervisor or managerial official within the facility, staff office or Administration, above the person who made the determination under paragraph 14b. If there is no "next higher" official, then the reconsideration will be done by the person making the paragraph 14b determination. The affected employee may also request a meeting with the reconsideration official to discuss the matter in person if both are at the same location. If at different locations, the employee may discuss his/her request with the reconsideration official by telephone. The reconsideration request, citing the specific reasons the employee believes the action should not be taken, must be submitted within 10 calendar days following the written decision of the return action. The reviewing official will make the decision based on a complete review of the record, including any discussions with the employee, and notify the employee in writing within 30 calendar days following receipt of the employee's reconsideration request.

b. This reconsideration request will not postpone the effective date of the return action unless the higher level reviewing official grants an extension. In no case will an extension serve to retain such an employee in a position beyond the completion date of the probationary period. The proposed return action must be completed prior to the end of the probationary period.

16. ADVERSE ACTIONS. Actions [to demote or remove an employee based on unacceptable performance must be processed in accordance with the provisions of VA Handbook 5021, Employee/Management Relations.]

17. [APPEALING PERFORMANCE-BASED ACTIONS]

a. [Per 5 CFR 315.908,] an action to return or reassign a supervisory/managerial probationary employee to a nonsupervisory or nonmanagerial position [] is not appealable.

b. Employees alleging discrimination due to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, physical handicap or age in connection with such a return action may file a complaint in accordance with agency discrimination complaints procedures. Final agency action on such complaints is appealable to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

c. Allegations of discrimination based on marital status or partisan political affiliation are appealable to the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB).

d. [Management] actions in connection with the reassignment or return of an employee under 5 CFR 315 are not grievable under the provisions of VA Handbook 5021.

e. Applicability of the probationary period requirements will be determined by [management]. Employees who believe that they have served in a supervisory or managerial position as defined in VA Handbook 5005, appendix III-A, and who wish to contest a determination that a probationary period is required by appendix III-A may grieve [management's] determination under the provisions of VA Handbook 5021. There is, however, no right to appeal such determination to the MSPB.

f. Employees serving in a probationary period under subpart H provisions are subject to the [limited appeal rights delineated in 5 CFR,] part 315, subpart H, section 315.806 [].

APRIL 6, 2007

**VA HANDBOOK 5013/4
PART I
APPENDIX F**

LEAVE PAGE BLANK

LEAVE PAGE BLANK

APRIL 6, 2007

**VA HANDBOOK 5013/4
PART I
APPENDIX F**

LEAVE PAGE BLANK

LEAVE PAGE BLANK

APRIL 6, 2007

**VA HANDBOOK 5013/4
PART I
APPENDIX F**

LEAVE PAGE BLANK

LEAVE PAGE BLANK

APRIL 6, 2007

**VA HANDBOOK 5013/4
PART I
APPENDIX F**

LEAVE PAGE BLANK

LEAVE PAGE BLANK

APRIL 6, 2007

**VA HANDBOOK 5013/4
PART I
APPENDIX F**

LEAVE PAGE BLANK

LEAVE PAGE BLANK

APRIL 6, 2007

**VA HANDBOOK 5013/4
PART I
APPENDIX F**

LEAVE PAGE BLANK

PART II. TITLE 38 PROFICIENCY RATING SYSTEM

1. SCOPE

a. This part implements the Proficiency Rating System used to appraise the performance of full-time, part-time and intermittent Physicians, Dentists, Podiatrists, Optometrists, Chiropractors, Nurses, Nurse Anesthetists, Physician Assistants, and Expanded-Function Dental Auxiliaries appointed under 38 U.S.C., chapter 73 or 74.

b. This part excludes the following:

(1) The Under Secretary for Health

(2) Distinguished Physicians

(3) Individuals at the Director grade appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7401(1) and individuals appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7306.

(4) Full-time, part-time and intermittent hybrid Title 38 employees appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7401(3) or 7405(a)(1)(B).

(5) Title 38 [supervisors and management officials] covered by the Veterans Health Administration [(VHA) Performance Appraisal Program are covered by this part for the purposes of poor performance and counseling only].

2. REFERENCES. Title 38 U.S.C., chapters 73 and 74

3. POLICY

a. The requirements for the Proficiency Rating System are regulations prescribed pursuant to section 7421 of Title 38, U.S. Code. The proficiency rating system is designed to assure the effective and efficient utilization of the covered employees and to furnish bases for assistance and guidance to them in the performance of their assignments and the development of their skills and abilities.

b. The proficiency rating system provides for planned, continuous, and systematic review, analysis and evaluation by all supervisors of the effectiveness of employees in their assignments.

c. The proficiency rating of supervisors includes an evaluation of their performance in furthering equal employment opportunity, including employment of disabled veterans and other individuals with disabilities, minority groups, and women.

4. PROCEDURES. The Under Secretary for Health and designees will prescribe instructions for periodic counseling of employees, for regular annual proficiency ratings, for delays of these ratings, and for special ratings to be made as administratively required.

(4) Network directors will conduct counseling conferences for heads of independent outpatient clinics.

(5) For VACO employees, counseling will be conducted by appropriate supervisory officials.

c. Nature of the Conference

(1) The counseling conference will be informal and confidential. The employee will be informed, orally or in writing, of the manner in which assignments are being performed. Duties and responsibilities which are essential to successful performance will be highlighted by the supervisor.

(2) Supervisors will commend strong performance, discuss objectively any weaknesses, and furnish suggestions and advice for improvement.

(3) Supervisors will indicate in subsequent annual or special reports when the employee's performance improves in areas previously cited as weaknesses.

(4) A counseling conference will be conducted prior to the date the annual report is issued if the supervisor contemplates giving the employee a low/minimally satisfactory or unsatisfactory overall rating, unless the rating is for a permanent employee appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7401(1) whose performance constitutes a clear danger to the employee or others; or, for all other employees, it is clear that improvement is unlikely or the employee's performance constitutes a clear danger to the employee or others. (See subparagraph e.)

d. Satisfactory or Better Performance. The rating official will discuss with the employees their satisfactory rating as soon as possible after the approving official has returned the approved reports.

NOTE: *The employee will complete Section F of VA Form 10-2623 or VA Form 10-2623a to indicate that the contents of the Proficiency Report have been discussed. If the employee refuses, the rating official will make a notation to this effect and sign and date it. The employee will be given a copy of the Proficiency Report form containing the approved proficiency rating.*

e. Low/Minimally Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory Performance

(1) At any time during the appraisal period when performance problems are observed which may be expected to result in a low/minimally satisfactory or unsatisfactory annual proficiency rating, the rating official will hold a counseling conference with the employee sufficiently in advance of the due date of the annual report to inform the employee of the deficiencies, give the employee a reasonable opportunity to correct identified deficiencies and demonstrate satisfactory performance, as follows:

(a) For a permanent employee appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7401(1) who has completed the probationary period and for whom a low/minimally satisfactory or unsatisfactory annual or special proficiency rating is to serve as a basis for [a performance-based action], the documented counseling requirements in subparagraphs (2) through (4) of this paragraph must be met unless the

b. When an unsatisfactory rating has been approved for a temporary full-time, part-time, or intermittent employee, supervisory officials will review the employee's service and, if applicable, clinical privileges, and determine whether termination is appropriate (See VA Handbook 5021).

c. When an unsatisfactory rating has been approved for a permanent employee, supervisory officials will review the employee's services and clinical privileges, and then determine which of the following actions may be appropriate:

(1) The employee [shall] be detailed for a period not to exceed 6 months under the guidance of a highly qualified preceptor.

(2) The employee [shall] be sent for additional training.

(3) The employee [shall] be reassigned or have a change in duty assignment.

(4) The employee's fitness for continued VHA employment [shall] be considered by a Physical Standards Board. (See VA Handbook 5019, Occupational Health Services.)

(5) The employee's clinical privileges [may] be modified.

(6) Procedures in VA Handbook 5021 [shall] should be initiated.

11. ADVICE FROM EXPERT SOURCES. Although it is ultimately the responsibility of management to evaluate performance and take appropriate action, under certain limited circumstances these officials may need other professional advice and assistance in analyzing the nature of observed performance deficiencies. [After obtaining any needed authorizations, t]he proficiency approving official may request assistance from such professional sources as the Deans Committee, a consultant, or a peer group with expertise in the areas of the performance in question. The person[(s)] so designated will review the specified deficiencies and report findings and recommendations to the approving official.

12. PERIODIC, OR LONGEVITY STEP INCREASES AND RATE ADJUSTMENTS

a. Physicians, Dentists, Podiatrists, Optometrists, Physician Assistants, Chiropractors, Registered Nurses, Nurse Anesthetists and Expanded Function Dental Auxiliaries

(1) **Requirements.** All full-time, part-time and intermittent physicians and dentists will automatically receive longevity step increases at the end of the required rating period. Full-time, part-time and intermittent podiatrists, optometrists, physician assistants and chiropractors will be considered for periodic step increases or rate adjustments when they complete the required waiting periods and their work meets all of the following conditions for acceptable level of competence:

(a) The total measure of the effectiveness and conduct of the employee is fully satisfactory, with any weaknesses balanced by strengths.

(b) A satisfactory current proficiency rating.

(c) No evidence or action is of record or in process that is contradictory to an overall judgment of current full satisfactory performance and conduct.

**APPENDIX A. INSTRUCTIONS FOR RATING AND PROCESSING
VA FORMS 10-2623 AND 10-2623a**

1. GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

a. Instructions for Rating and Approving Officials

(1) Unless otherwise indicated, the rating and approving officials will normally be an employee's immediate and higher level supervisors. Narrative evaluations and comments will be prepared by the rating and approving officials.

(2) VA Form 10-2623 and 10-2623a include a worksheet for the rating official.

(3) If the probationary review is due, the review will be completed in accordance with VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, part II, chapter 3, paragraph F. Section A, item 7, of VA Form 10-2623 and VA Form 10-2623a will be blank if the probationary review is not due.

(4) Rating and approving officials will be objective in rating the employee and will document in the narrative sections the reasons for the rating.

(5) The forms for submission [shall] be completed from the worksheet. Type names and exact titles of rating and approving officials in appropriate spaces. Signatures [must] be in ink.

(6) When the rating is completed, the rating official will forward copies to the approving official as "FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY" documents.

(7) The approving official will confer with the rating official to discuss any differences in the evaluation of the employee's performance, make a decision and record any changes in ink.

(8) On completion of the approved rating, the Proficiency Reports will be returned to the rating official as "FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY" documents. The rating official will discuss the rating with the employee. Section F of VA Form 10-2623 or 10-2623a will be completed by the employee. If the employee refuses to complete this section, the rating official will so note on the form. The rating official will give a copy to the employee and then forward to the Human Resources Management office the personnel folder copy and the Board Action folder copy.

(9) An employee with a low satisfactory or unsatisfactory rating will be counseled as described in paragraph 9 of part II, this handbook.

(10) An unsatisfactory Proficiency Report will be processed under instructions contained in paragraph 10 of part II, this handbook.

**PART II
APPENIX A**

b. Action by Human Resources Management Office

(1) The Human Resources Management office is responsible for following procedures outlined in MP-6, part V, supplement No. 1.5, and for coding accurately to assure processing of annual ratings. The Human Resources Management office will insure that Section A of VA Forms 10-2623 and 10-12623a is properly completed and will forward the required copies of the forms (through the chief of service if a probationary review is necessary) to the rating official. A suspense copy will be retained by the Human Resources Management office for follow-up action.

(2) When the Human Resources Management office receives the approved Proficiency Report forms, a careful review will be made to insure that all administrative requirements are met.

(3) The Human Resources Management office will assure that the appropriate copies are distributed as shown on the Proficiency Report form. This will include filing the original in the personnel folder and Board Action folder.

2. SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR RATING AND PROCESSING VA FORM 10-2623 FOR NURSES

a. General Instructions

(1) The Nurse Qualification Standard and appropriate functional statement (M-2, part V) delineate the criteria upon which the nurse will be evaluated by the rating and approving officials.

(2) The Proficiency Report will document the performance level achieved during the rating period.

(3) Current criteria-based functional statements for each category of professional nurse position will be developed in writing and revised as necessary to maintain currency. Each nurse will be given a copy of his or her functional statement upon initial employment and anytime thereafter when the employee's assignment is changed and/or the functional statement is revised.

(4) The use of the criteria-based functional statement and the qualification standard in conjunction with the Proficiency Report is designed to require supervisors to evaluate performance in an employee's assignment. The Proficiency Report will be used to document how the nurse meets the behaviors outlined in the functional statement and the grade level criteria in the qualification standard. The functional statement [shall] reflect observable behaviors appropriate to the grade level.

(5) At any time during the rating period that a nurse's performance is not at least satisfactory, the supervisor [shall] discuss with the employee any noted areas of weakness related to the qualification standard grade criteria and/or expected behaviors outlined in the functional statement.

**PART II
APPENIX A**

c. An adjective rating will be assigned for each appropriate category in Section B. Elements in each category [shall] be evaluated both separately and on an overall basis, taking into consideration strong and weak points of performance and consistent with the employee's clinical privileges.

d. Overall evaluation, Section C, [shall] reflect the total work performance. An overall unsatisfactory rating will result when the employee's performance has not met reasonable expectations, or the overall appraisal indicates weaknesses which would impair quality patient care, or there is inadequate proficiency or weak performance in one or more elements critical to adequate performance of the assignment. (See paragraphs 8, 9, and 10 of part II, this handbook.) A low satisfactory rating will result when employee's performance usually met reasonable expectations, but performance was sometimes marginal.

e. The "Instruction Sheet" for the Proficiency Rating Form (included as part 6 of the interleaved fanfold of VA Form 10-2623a) contains specific instructions concerning the completion of the rating process, narrative summary, and overall evaluation. Special instructions concerning the rating process are included to assist in determining the overall adjective rating.

4. SEQUENCE OF THE PROFICIENCY RATING PROCESS FOR POSITIONS WHICH GO ABOVE FACILITY LEVEL FOR RATING AND/OR APPROVAL. Employees will be rated by their immediate and higher level supervisors with the exceptions as follows:

a. If one of these supervisory assignments is vacant, the next higher level supervisor will serve as the approving official. If both these supervisory assignments are vacant, the next two higher level supervisors will serve as the rating and approving officials.

b. If the facility Director serves as the rating official, the Network Director or higher level line official, after considering the comments of appropriate program officials, will serve as the approving official. Ratings forwarded for VA Central Office approval must be sent to the appropriate program office.

c. Facility directors will rate chiefs of staff and will approve ratings of service chiefs. They will also approve ratings of staff physicians and others when irregular situations place them in the normal line of supervision. Ratings of employees which go above the facility level for rating or approval will be routed through the facility Director for initials on the Proficiency Report Form to indicate review or for comments, as appropriate.