

Performance Development Program – FAQs

Q1. Why is this being introduced now?

A. *Actually, the State’s Performance Development Program was introduced in 2017. The first year used a (paper-based) pilot program with only a few hundred employees participating. The program expanded to all (Executive Branch) non-union employees utilizing an online platform, NeoGov, in 2018. After negotiations with the unions took place in 2018, a MOU was signed expanding participation again in 2020 to include union-affiliated employees. In 2020, as part of the continuing incremental expansion, union-affiliated employees in a supervisory role were also included but the program was put on hold mid-cycle due to the pandemic. The next participant expansion will be the 2024 cycle, adding more union-affiliated employees, with the ultimate goal of all employees participating in future cycles.*

Q2. What is the purpose of the program?

A. *The Performance Development Program is meant to be an employee development program- to help employees develop skills that help them grow professionally resulting in improved performance for the department with things like efficiency, creative solutions to problems and “customer” satisfaction. It is also intended to encourage on-going communication between supervisors and their direct reports.*

Q3. Is the State is using this to fire/get rid of people?

A. *The Performance Development program has been in existence since 2017 and nobody has been fired as a result of the program. In fact, there is an agreement between the state and unions that it cannot be used punitively.*

Q4. Can my boss assign goals that are outside the responsibility of my job?

A. *Your supervisor should not be using the Performance Development Program to assign tasks that are outside the purview of your role. You and your supervisor should discuss goals to include on your performance development plan (PDP) during the initial meeting and they should follow the S.M.A.R.T. format (specific, measurable, attainable, **relevant**, timely). Goals should ultimately help you develop skills that benefit your role, the people/clients you serve, and the department.*

Q5. Do I have to participate?

A. *Employees are required to participate if they fall into the current participation criteria. As the State continues to expand participation, eventually all employees will be participating. For the 2024 cycle all employees (union-affiliated and non-union affiliated) in the following agencies: DOA, DBR, DLT, DPUC, Commerce, Housing, DEM, DOR, DPS, DOH, EOHHS, and RIEMA are required to participate. All Non-union employees and union-affiliated employees in a supervisory role in the following agencies: DCYF, BHDDH, DOT, DOC, DHS are also required to participate.*

Q6. What do I do if my supervisor is not engaging me in the process?

- A. *The Performance Development Program is meant to be a collaborative process between the supervisor and his/her direct report, but it is the supervisor who should be **leading** the process with his/her direct report. With that said however, you can ask your supervisor about the step in the process that should be happening and prompt activity, such as asking if s/he would like you to schedule the required meeting.*

Q7. What do I do if my direct report is not engaging in the process?

- A. *First and foremost, have a conversation with your direct report to talk about the purpose of the program. S/he may have a misunderstanding and not realize the potential benefit to his/her own professional growth and development.*

Q8. I am a supervisor and have to lead some of my direct reports through the process but I don't feel confident in my ability to do that. What do I do?

- A. *There are MANY free courses available through the RI Learning Center to build upon your skills as a supervisor and support you through the process. Some are live/scheduled webinars and many are now available on-demand. Sample titles include: Communication for Managers, Dealing With the Elephant in the Room, Dealing With Challenging People, Mentoring and Developing Talent Through Coaching, Performance Management, You're Promoted – The New Manager, etc.*

Q9. Who has access to my performance development plan?

- A. *You and your current supervisor have access to your PDPs. The NeoGov Performance system administrators in HR also have access to assist with troubleshooting when necessary. Currently, employees have access to their past performance development plans indefinitely.*

Q10. Can edits/changes be made to my PDP?

- A. *A supervisor can make edits to a PDP but all employee acknowledgement/sign-offs are re-triggered when changes are made. This may be necessary when department priorities change due to funding, reorganization, etc.*

Q11. Do I have to complete the training?

- A. *Training is required for all new participants but all participants are welcome to re-watch the training as a refresher. Experience has shown us that people who did not complete the training often 1) have a misconception of the purpose of the program, and 2) have a hard time navigating the NeoGov system and are unsure of the process milestones, including what is required at each step.*

Q12. What do I do if I am having trouble navigating within NeoGov?

A. *The first thing you should do is refer to your “User Guide”; the User Guides have step by step instructions for navigating in NeoGov and includes screenshots to show you exactly what to do. If you still need help, email doa.performancedev@hr.ri.gov or call (401) 222-5909.*

Q13. Does my union leadership know that I am being told to participate in this?

A. *Yes, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) regarding bargaining unit member participation in the Performance Development Program was signed by union leadership and the State in 2018.*

Q14. What happens when a manager changes during the performance development cycle?

A. *The new manager should look at the content of the PDP and meet with each employee to discuss. Depending on the time of year in the cycle, changes may not be recommended. The supervisor should contact the Performance Development Unit in HR to discuss.*

Q15. Do new employees have to participate if they start in their position after the initial launch at the start of the calendar year?

A. *It depends on the time of the year. If an employee starts before Sept. 1st, the supervisor is required to lead the employee through the Performance Development Program after s/he completes the required training. Both the supervisor and (new) direct report will receive an email communication regarding training.*

Q16. Will this program be used for discipline?

A. *This program is independent from and totally unrelated to the progressive discipline process already in place with collective bargaining units. In fact, there is an agreement between the state and unions that it cannot be used punitively, documented in the MOU.*

Q17. I am a supervisor and don't have time to do this with my staff. What do I do?

A. *Having regular conversations with your staff about their professional goals, performance, strategic priorities of the department, strengths and areas for improvement is important and an essential part of being an effective leader. Your direct reports need and deserve your support, coaching and guidance to excel in their role.*

Q18. My direct report and I don't know what would be good SMART goals to set. What do I do?

A. *Contact the Performance Development Unit in HR via email doa.performancedev@hr.ri.gov or call (401) 222-5909; we will be able to help you (and are happy to).*

Q19. What if I get a “Needs Improvement” in one or more areas?

A. *This rating does not trigger a disciplinary action. If your supervisor feels you need improvement in an area, this process allows you to connect with him/her and discuss what you need from each other to be the most effective team.*

Q20. What if my department already has performance reviews due to accreditation requirements?

A. *In those cases, Performance Development in HR has worked with those departments or units to modify the PDP to meet both the accreditation requirement for employee reviews and the purpose of the State’s Performance Development Program.*

Q21. What do I do if I have questions about the Performance Development Program?

A. *Contact the Performance Development Unit in HR via email doa.performancedev@hr.ri.gov or call (401) 222-5909.*

Q22. Will performance development be used to prompt compensation increases?

A. *No. The State of Rhode Island does not employ a merit-based pay system, and this program does not change that.*

Q23. How will the process be applied across all employees given differences in roles and responsibilities?

A. *The performance development plan template was created in a way that makes them unique and tailored to each employee. For example, SMART goals are discussed and decided upon in conversation with the supervisor and direct report rather than being selected from a preestablished list. As the program is intended to help employees develop professionally, the skills each employee will want or need to develop will vary.*

Q24. Are supervisors properly qualified and trained to provide reviews?

A. *All participants, whether supervisory or non-supervisory, are required to complete the performance development training- either the live (online) version or the self-guided version, depending on preference. Supervisors are required to do the “Supervisor” version, as it gives guidance on leading staff through performance development, but supervisors are also welcome and encouraged to also complete the non-supervisor training as they will be going through the program with their own supervisor as well. Additionally, there are many resources available in the RI Learning Center to help supervisors build their leadership skills. Part of being a supervisor, in any role, is providing feedback to your direct reports- on an ongoing informal basis. The Performance Development Program is part of providing that feedback in just a more structured way. We also recommend that supervisors who are new to performance development begin the process of being led by their own supervisor first, before leading their direct reports through the process.*

Q25. What is the roll-out plan?

A. *The launch of a cycle has been, and will continue to be, an initial general announcement of the cycle launch followed by a training announcement.*

Q26. Do all levels of leadership at my agency participate?

A. *Yes, all levels of leadership participate.*

Q27. What are the review standards and who decides them?

A. *The program uses two different three-factor rating scales: "Completion Rate" (Incomplete, Partially Completed, Completed and N/A) is used for SMART goals and professional development, and "Expectations" (Exceeds Expectations, Meets Expectations, Below Expectations and N/A) is used for success factors. There is a definition of each rating provided on the PDP. Comments are REQUIRED by the supervisor and/or employee (self-rating) if anything other than the "Meets" or "Completed" is selected.*

Q28. As a supervisor, can I use this as an opportunity to increase output/production of my staff?

A. *This program is not meant to be used to create goals for individuals to increase their output/production. That may be an outcome of an employee becoming more effective or efficient in his/her role, particularly if the employee is striving for increased productivity. For example, if an employee has a S.M.A.R.T. goal to develop a particular skill and consequently becomes more adept at solving a recurring problem with the new skill, s/he will be more efficient each time the same problem is encountered.*