

# DIALOGUE FOR DIRECTION GUIDE

This guide has been prepared by the Office of Human Resources Development (HRD) in an effort to assist University of Hartford employees in the performance appraisal process.

## Introduction

As a University of Hartford staff member, it is incumbent upon each of us to perform the duties and responsibilities of our positions in a manner which positively contributes towards overall departmental and University goals. Individual job performance and resulting productivity will reach its fullest potential when the right interaction exists between the supervisor and the staff member. Participating in the performance appraisal process provides us with the opportunity to continue to develop the supervisor-staff member relationship in job performance matters.

Once a year, the University of Hartford's Performance Development – Dialogue for Direction Policy (Staff Employment Manual, Chapter 6.06) requires supervisors to conduct formal performance appraisals of their staff. The University's **Dialogue for Direction** program provides a process for facilitating this discussion as well as a means to plan objectives and direction for the next year. Dialogue for Direction implies two-way communication, clarifying of job performance expectations and surfacing of new ideas. This annual program, by which the supervisor evaluates the staff member's job performance in light of his/her overall contribution to departmental goals, is directly linked to the University's merit pay program. To be most effective, both the supervisor and the staff member must have a strong commitment to this process.

## Preparing for the Meeting

The supervisor should schedule the Dialogue for Direction meeting in advance. This will allow both the supervisor and the staff member time to prepare to actively contribute to this important discussion. The staff member should complete his/her self-evaluation, reviewing any relevant documents, especially goals which were documented on the prior year's performance appraisal, and provide this information to his/her supervisor a day or two before the performance appraisal meeting.

## Dialogue for Direction Form

The general sections of the Dialogue for Direction Form are outlined below.

### Discussion of Job

The heart of the Dialogue for Direction process is the position's job description. Consistent with the University's Salary Administration Policy (Staff Employment Manual, Chapter 4.01), the job description is a brief, written description which contains a position summary, key duties and responsibilities, working conditions, physical effort and key job requirements. A job description is not intended to be a complete statement of every function of a position, nor does it set objectives or standards of job performance. These are done through the performance review and ongoing dialogue, and are the responsibility of the supervisor.

The onset of the Dialogue for Direction meeting should focus on a discussion of the job, using the staff member's current job description as a tool to guide this conversation. It is critical that the job description is reviewed collaboratively with the staff member, at least annually, so that the staff member understands how his/her position fits in the "big picture" within the department and University as a whole. This important discussion also provides the supervisor and the staff member with an opportunity to compare expectations of the position, clarify any misinterpretations that may exist as well as ensure that the job description accurately reflects the position's duties and responsibilities.

The job description is used in classifying a position in the proper salary grade (and corresponding salary range). If it is concluded during the Dialogue for Direction process that the job description no longer accurately reflects the duties and responsibilities of the position, it is the supervisor's responsibility to work with the designated HR Manager to ensure the job description is updated accordingly.

## Staff Member Planning of Objectives and Improvements

This section of the form provides the staff member with the opportunity to identify his/her objectives as well as outline what can be done to help him/her become more effective in the position over the next year. Supervisors are urged to seek clarification when necessary in an effort to assist the staff member in achieving anticipated job performance goals.

## Supervisor Planning of Objectives, Priorities and Expectations

This section of the form provides supervisors with the opportunity to outline their expectations of the staff member over the next year. New initiatives and/or projects for the staff member should be identified which are appropriate to the position and fair in relation to ability. Staff members are urged to seek clarification when necessary so that anticipated job performance goals can be achieved.

## Evaluation of Competency Areas

This section of the form provides the supervisor with the opportunity to objectively evaluate the staff member's demonstrated job performance using core competencies that the University deems critical to our institutional objectives. The table below offers general information on some of these competencies.

Core Competency	Front-line Staff	Mid-level Staff	Upper-level Staff
Innovation and Change	Displays creativity; adapts quickly to new ideas and approaches.	Evaluates and implements ideas which guide organizational efficiencies.	Drives continuous improvement in overall business operations.
Planning and Organizing	Prioritizes and organizes workload effectively to complete assignments.	Develops plans to complete work, accounting for unplanned contingencies.	Thinks strategically to improve productivity throughout the organization.
Problem Solving	Identifies problems; gathers information to address issues.	Analyzes alternatives; troubleshoots and makes appropriate decisions.	Thinks broadly and strategically to anticipate organizational concerns.
Customer Support	Serves constituents effectively, respectfully and in a timely manner.	Champions constituents' needs in an effort to reach balanced, fair resolutions.	Builds a customer-focused organization consistent with mission and strategic goals.
Collaboration and Teamwork	Cooperates and supports co-workers to achieve goals.	Builds and supports teams; promotes a welcoming and inclusive environment.	Fosters collaborative leadership; builds positive working relationships.

Demonstrated job performance over the last full review period (typically one year), not isolated incidents, should be evaluated and ranked as **(1) exceeds expectations; (2) meets expectations or (3) does not meet expectations**. The examples below provide some general indicators regarding the ranking method.

*Exceeds expectations – goes above and beyond in follow through; takes responsibility; highly professional.*

*Meets expectations – handles service problems; knows products/service; courteous.*

*Does not meet expectations – inadequate follow through or does not follow through; does not know service procedures; discourteous.*

The performance appraisal should be honest, accurate and candid. If there are gaps between supervisory expectations and the staff member's job performance, these gaps should be explained using specific examples to support this feedback. There may be mitigating circumstances which have hindered a staff member's job performance, so staff should be provided with an opportunity to explain any gaps that may exist, and supervisors should be willing to accept that these circumstances may be valid.

## Commendation(s)

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This section of the form provides the supervisor with the opportunity to formally recognize the staff member's strengths, accomplishments, efforts and skills that have contributed to the department's success.

## Improvement(s)

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This section of the form provides the supervisor with the opportunity to provide feedback in areas of the staff member's job performance that need(s) improvement. Supervisors should be prepared to link job performance improvement opportunities to solutions.

## Supervisor's Additional Comments

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This section of the form allows the supervisor to provide additional feedback related to the staff member's overall job performance, making sure to concentrate on areas that are job-related and within the staff member's control.

## Supervisor's Overall Job Performance Rating of Staff Member

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This section of the form allows the supervisor to determine an overall job performance rating reflective of the collective evaluation of the position's competency areas, as outlined in Section III. Please note that based on the scope of the position, certain competencies may weigh more heavily than others when determining overall performance.

## Staff Member's Comments

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This section of the form provides the staff member with the opportunity to document any additional comments regarding his/her job performance.

## During the Meeting

It is important to remember that open and honest communication and a continuing dialogue are both central and crucial to the performance appraisal process. The performance appraisal meeting should be conducted in a manner which ensures privacy and avoids interruptions.

A valued employee should hear praise and positive comments at the start of this meeting. Supervisors should emphasize supportive intentions, describe their agenda for the meeting and encourage the staff member to ask questions, express concerns or comment on this process during this meeting.

The performance appraisal should focus on the future by discussing anticipated goals for the next year. It is the supervisor's role to provide appropriate assistance which will help their staff achieve their goals.

## After the Meeting

Supervisors should try, whenever possible and/or appropriate, to incorporate the staff member's planning objectives with their objectives as well as identify benchmarks which will be used to measure successful completion of goals.

The staff member should take some time (typically two or three days) to absorb what was discussed in this important meeting. Once the Dialogue for Direction form has been reviewed and signed by both the supervisor and the staff member, it should be forwarded to HRD to be maintained in the staff member's official personnel file.

**REMEMBER:** *Every staff member has a right to have his/her job performance fairly and accurately reviewed, evaluated and documented. Through this process, each staff member should be encouraged to develop to their fullest professional potential.*