



Key Issues in a Performance Improvement Plan

Every performance improvement plan (PIP) should address certain fundamental points. Use this information as a guideline. However, supervisors should always consult with Human Resources Management before giving a performance improvement plan to an employee. The following items should be addressed in every performance improvement plan.

1. Describe why the plan is necessary

This is a clear summary statement that performance is not meeting the requirements or the expectations of the supervisor. It identifies the performance and/or behavioral issue that is a problem and emphasizes the need for improved performance and/or corrected behavior.

2. Identify the problem to be corrected

Here the PIP identifies or lists specific facts (i.e. names, dates, places, persons affected, etc.) that demonstrate the performance or behavioral problem. Some of the problems may already have a history of informal or formal counseling and coaching behind them. Such history should be described and enumerated. Some issues may be connected to a progressive disciplinary process that is in the works. Such information also needs to be included in the PIP. Regardless, the PIP needs to be specific and factual (i.e. not hearsay, opinions, generalized or vague references). This is the place to talk about the importance of the work and link it to the success of the employee, the department, and the mission of the University. Talk about the importance of the issue as a part of a bigger picture and its impact on others. In other words, discuss the business impact of the problem.

3. Explain what must happen and how performance will be measured.

Here you establish specific, measurable objectives and timelines for making progress. Expectations are clearly described and communicated. This should include how the employee's performance will be measured. Performance standards should have face value, be reasonable, and attainable. This piece is the central part of the supervisor's action plan. It defines and details the supervisor's expectations and works to ensure the employee understands what is expected in order for them to meet those expectations.



4. Describe what resources are available to assist the employee

The PIP should not be limited only to the things the employee must do. It should also identify what resources, materials, training, and etc. will be made available to help the employee meet the performance expectations. This could take many forms that include things like: (1) training, assigned books to read, or classes to attend, (2) mentoring by supervisor or other staff, (3) job shadowing an another employee who has good command of the skills or behaviors in question, or (4) periodic meetings with the supervisor or staff who will train/assist the employee.

5. Identify how long the PIP will be in effect

Any employee placed on a PIP needs to understand that the PIP is time-sensitive. The PIP must explicitly identify the period of time after which some level of improvement is expected. Depending on the nature of the performance or behavior issues being addressed, the amount of time allotted may vary. This time period might be set anywhere from 30 – 120 days. If the issue is easily remedied, the time frame can be short. Supervisors may also include a renewal clause for the PIP. This would be something that indicates if satisfactory performance is not achieved during the designated time frame, the PIP will be extended. Whatever the timeline, it should be clearly understood by the employee that changes in performance and/or behavior is expected by the specified date. Supervisors should maintain active contact with the employee throughout the duration of the PIP. As such, the supervisor should schedule and conduct frequent review meetings to discuss employee progress while the PIP is in effect.

6. Describe the consequences if performance is not improved.

The employee should clearly understand what the consequences are if the standards described in the PIP are not met. Options may include extending the PIP for another specified period or moving to one of the formal steps in the disciplinary process. Depending on the nature of the performance issue, it is not uncommon to find language in a PIP similar to the following.

If after reasonable amount of time has passed and it is determined that the stated performance issue continues at a level that does not meet requirements, more formal disciplinary actions may follow and require the University to make a retention decision. (Define what constitutes a reasonable amount of time.) For some situations, it may be appropriate to say that an immediate change is expected and must be sustained for the duration of the employee's career and that failure to do so may lead to more formal disciplinary actions—up to and including termination.



Other terms, conditions and elements to include in the PIP

- Signatures – both supervisor and employee (sometimes signatures should include the next level supervisor); includes any witnesses or third party participants to the meeting in which the PIP is discussed.
- Review date(s) – date for first review meeting to discuss progress in meeting the PIP.
- Grievance procedures – options available to employees if they believe the PIP is without merit, capricious or unfounded.
- Disposition – identify all the parties who will receive a copy of the PIP; typically copies of the PIP are not added to an employees file unless they were unable to meet the conditions of the PIP and more formal disciplinary actions followed.