DIRECTIVE

**Procedures for Performance
Check-in Conversations**

Overview

The performance check-in conversations process provides a recurring means for employees and managers to set clear expectations and goals, to share feedback, and to discuss development needs to enhance performance.

Check-in conversations place a primary focus on coaching and feedback, on improving current performance, and on grooming talent for the future. With regular conversations, managers and employees establish a greater transparency about individual expectations and how their work supports the Partnership's mission. With this shift in mindset, check-ins will become to feel like a regular part of how we get our work done.

Performance check-ins will be conducted **at least** quarterly between direct manager and employee. Check-in conversations are typically 60-90 minutes long and will happen at least once each quarter of the fiscal year. Check-ins follow a three-phase cycle – expectations, feedback and development – originally developed by tech giant Adobe.

The Flow of Check-ins

Generally, performance check-ins follow three core steps that repeat each fiscal year:

1. **Expectations**: First, agree what is expected of employees for the year in terms of deliverables, behavior and contributions. Managers set clear expectations to help employees achieve business and personal goals.
2. **Feedback**: Next, provide frequent, two-way feedback to see how employees are progressing against expectations and let managers know if they could be doing something differently to better support the employee. Managers and employees provide each other with ongoing and constructive feedback.
3. **Development**: Then, when employees know how they are performing, they can plan actionable goals in terms of learning, career and experience. With support from their manager, employees drive their own growth and development.

The Cadence of Check-ins

Performance check-ins operate, at a minimum, on a quarterly basis in the fiscal calendar year, which runs July to June. Here's an example timeline of performance conversations following a quarterly cycle:

1. **June 1 to June 30**, *Performance Planning.* Department heads look at the year ahead and begin setting departmental expectations with managers. *What is the organizational focus,*

department focus, team focus, and how are they connected? Supervising managers/leads will begin scheduling individual expectation check-ins with their team members.

2. **July 1 to July 31**, *Expectation Check-in.* Supervising managers will meet with their team members one-on-one to establish and fine-tune expectations with each employee based on their individual contributions and roles. Once expectations are set, the manager will work with the employee to set SMART goals.
3. **October 1 to October 31**, *Feedback Check-in.* Supervising managers schedule one-on-one meeting with each team member to assess expectations, goals and progress, and to provide feedback to each other.
4. **January 1 to January 31**, *Feedback/Development Check-in.* Supervising managers schedule one-on-one meeting with each team member to assess expectations, goals and progress, and to provide feedback to each other. They may also discuss development needs.
5. **April 1 to April 30**, *Feedback/Development Check-in.* Supervising managers schedule one-on-one meeting with each team member to assess expectations, goals and progress, and to provide feedback to each other. They may also discuss development needs.
6. **June 1 to June 30**, *Performance Planning.* Cycle repeats. See step 1.

Step 1: Expectations Check-ins

Setting expectations is the first of three steps in the performance check-in cycle. You and your manager agree upon key deliverables, behaviors and results for the fiscal year.

Employees are required to set goals based on these expectations (with your manager's support). Goals define the specific steps employees will take to meet the expectations.

Employees and managers should review expectations regularly to ensure they remain relevant as business priorities and circumstances change.

Employee and manager responsibilities:

- The department head is responsible for ensuring that managers understand key business outcomes and priorities for the upcoming year.
- The manager is responsible for ensuring that employees receive clear expectations that are aligned with key business needs and priorities.
- The employee is responsible for drafting appropriate goals that align to each expectation and to review these regularly with his/her/their manager.
- Both manager and employee are responsible for providing constructive feedback on what's working and what could improve.

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Getting started:

1. **Plan**. Department heads begin planning and setting department objectives based on organization's goals and priorities. Meet with your managers to discuss department objectives and setting expectations for employees.
2. **Schedule**. Managers begin scheduling check-in conversations for each team member. Managers send employees the expectations discussion guide and worksheet with drafted expectations.
3. **Draft**. Employees use the discussion guide and worksheet to prepare a draft of their goals.
4. **Discuss**. Using the **Expectations Discussion Guide** and **Expectations Worksheet**, managers and employees meet and agree on clear expectations.
5. **Refine**. Using the expectations discussion guide and worksheet, employees review and refine SMART goals with their managers.
6. **Review**. Review and discuss next steps. Schedule the next check-in conversation. You can set a cadence that works best for your employee, but should be quarterly at a minimum. Managers should also allow check-ins to happen at any agreed upon time, especially if the employee requests a meeting before the next scheduled check-in.
7. **Submit**. Use Paychex to record expectations and goals.

Setting expectations (managers):

1. **Make expectations crystal clear**. Don't use overcomplicated language. Keep it simple and clearly define what your employee needs to do. Lay out exactly what success looks like.
2. **Tell employees WHY**. Explain to them how their roles fit into the overall organization. Provide the business context for expected tasks and responsibilities.
3. **Set up for success**. Make sure your employees have the appropriate knowledge, skills, abilities, and resources to accomplish what you are asking them to do. Expectations should be challenging, but should also be achievable.
4. **Measure success**. When setting expectations, it is crucial that they are measurable. The key is to find several short-term or smaller steps within the overall plan that can be quantified. Know what your metrics are and help your team track them.
5. **Carve out the time**. Treat the time that you set aside for check-ins as sacred in your calendar. Don't cancel because of other pressing issues. Show your employees how much you value them. The same goes for employees.
6. **Listen**. As a manager, don't make the mistake of doing most of the talking during check-ins. You risk not hearing if your employees are facing challenges, whether they truly understand the expectations set and what steps are needed to reach them. When setting expectations, remaining flexible is key. Sometimes employees need to hear them more than once or need them explained in different ways before they really resonate.

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Setting SMART goals (employees):

To make sure your goals are clear and reachable, each one should follow the SMART acronym. This will help you and your manager identify the associate goals and success criteria for each of your manager's expectations.

1. **Specific**. Your goal should be clear and specific. Try to answer the five "W" questions.
    a. What do I want to accomplish?
    b. Why is this goal important?
    c. Who is involved?
    d. Where is it located?
    e. Which resources or limits are involved?
2. **Measurable**. You need to be able to track your progress and stay motivated as you get closer to achieving your goal. A measurable goal should address questions like:
    a. How much?
    b. How many?
    c. How will I know when it is accomplished?
3. **Achievable**. Your goal needs to be realistic and attainable to be successful. It should stretch your abilities, but still remain possible. An achievable goal will usually answer questions like:
    a. How can I accomplish this goal?
    b. What obstacles could get in the way of this goal and how do I plan to overcome them?
4. **Relevant**. Ensure that your goal matters to you and that it aligns with the business/department goals. A relevant goal can answer "yes" to these questions:
    a. Does this seem worthwhile?
    b. Is this the right time?
    c. Does this align with our larger goals and priorities?
    d. Am I the right person to reach this goal?
5. **Time-bound**. Every goal needs a target date, so that you have a deadline to focus on and something to work toward. This helps to prevent everyday tasks from taking priority over your longer-term goals. It should usually answer these types of questions:
    a. When?
    b. What can I do six months from now?
    c. What can I do six weeks from now?
    d. What can I do today?

Modelling the expectations check-in:

A model expectation check-in should follow these discussion topics. Employees should arrive at the expectations check-in prepared to review a draft of their smart goals. Both manager and employee should take and keep notes during all check-ins.

1. **Give context**. Begin the conversation by discussing context. Explain how the team and employee fit into the broader organization. Confirm the overarching goals and critical priorities for the

department and organization. Discuss key deliverables for the year, and make sure you both agree on the expectations.

2. **SMART**. Next review the expectations worksheet and complete SMART goals together. Discuss how each goal answers each characteristic of the SMART acronym.
3. **Obstacles**. As you review and complete SMART goals together, make sure there are specific tasks tied to expectations. Understand what obstacles could exist, how the employee plans to overcome them, and what supports are needed. Work out HOW goals will be achieved, not just what will be achieved.
4. **Review**. This is your opportunity to double-check you understand what is expected and what supports are needed. Confirm and set how often you'd like to meet and review progress. At a minimum, you must meet quarterly. Confirm your immediate next steps (i.e. finalize and submit your goals in Paychex).

Step 2: Feedback Check-ins

Now that the expectations and goals are set, it's time to look forward to providing two-way feedback and assessing the expectations and progress toward goals. These meetings are called feedback check-ins. You should have already scheduled the feedback check-in at the end of the expectation check-in. At a minimum, you should meet and provide feedback once every quarter.

Both employee and manager should provide timely, specific, and balanced feedback to each other. Don't avoid the tough conversations and be open to hearing difficult feedback. Constructive, critical feedback is often the most helpful to people. For additional resources on communication skills for feedback check-ins, you may complete The Seven Challenges and learn how to develop a coaching habit with the Coaching Habit videos.

Getting Started

1. **Plan**. Before the feedback check-in, employees and managers should prepare for the conversation using the provided discussion guides and conversation tips. Managers should also meet with their department head to discuss feedback.
2. **Snapshot**. Managers and department heads should complete the **Performance Snapshot** handout together. Using four simple questions, the snapshot is designed to provide a quick assessment of what managers would *do* with each team member rather than what they *think* of that individual. The snapshot reinforces the attitude that performance is prospective, not retrospective.
3. **Discuss**. Using the **Feedback Discussion Guide**, managers and employees meet and review how employees are progressing against expectations and provide constructive feedback to each other. The discussion should follow the 4 steps in the discussion guide: specifics, ask, impact, and do.

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4. **Review**. Collaboratively agree on what needs to continue or change and put a plan into action. Schedule the next feedback check-in. Remember that check-ins can also happen at any agreed-upon time.
5. **Submit**. After the Expectations check-in, once every quarter, you will be asked to complete a feedback check-in survey in Paychex. This survey will answer if you have or have not had a feedback check-in this quarter. It will also allow both employee and manager to record any notes that they wish in Paychex.

Giving Feedback

- Remember that feedback can be provided in the moment outside of your scheduled check-in. The best feedback is immediate. Employees are encouraged to ask for feedback often. Managers should allow check-ins to happen at any agreed-upon time, especially if an employee requests a meeting.
- Reflect on your intentions for conversation. *Am I being fair and accurate? What do I hope to achieve with this feedback? How can I foster an open and positive discussion?*
- Feedback should be a two-way conversation. Give others the chance to acknowledge success or own a problem. *How do you think you're doing? What was that like for you? How could you have done that differently?*
- Listen. And when it's your turn to speak, talk about facts, not assumptions.
- Use specific, observable language when offering your feedback. *I have observed that you do/say X and it impacts me in this way Y.*
- Feedback is a dialogue between two people; it should be a discussion, not a series of one-way comments. *What's your perspective on this? What ideas do you have in regards to next steps?*

Common Feedback Mistakes

- **Making assumptions**. Limit feedback to observable behavior or actions without personal interpretations.
- **Talking too much and poor listening**. There are four villains of listening: dramatic, interrupting, lost, and shrewd. Any one of them can be at play for anyone at any time. [Learn about your villains and how to overcome them](#).
- **Focusing too much on negatives**. Focus your feedback mainly on strengths and appreciation. When you do focus on negative performance, frame it not as a weakness, but an obstacle to be overcome.

Receiving Feedback

- If you get defensive about feedback, people won't give it to you and you'll lose opportunities to learn and grow. Defensiveness can include denying, ridiculing, or blaming.
- While some have a hard time hearing feedback, others thrive on it. They focus on their ability to change and grow, and see feedback as an opportunity for improvement. This kind of growth mindset is a powerful advantage.

- Ask for feedback often. If you had to make two suggestions for improving my work, what would they be? If you were in my position, what would you do? What do I do well that makes me effective?
- It is important to acknowledge some feedback is delivered poorly or with poor intent. Acknowledge the person for sharing their thoughts and then only take on what is relevant to your growth.

Step 3: Development Check-ins

At a certain point during the performance conversations cycle, employees and managers should have a conversation about development. Development check-ins allow employees to drive their own growth and development, and allow managers to hear how they can best support their team's potential. Through this process, employees will craft a plan of action that aligns their strengths, career aspirations, and business needs.

Generally, development conversations will happen *after* the Expectations and Feedback check-ins, especially your first one. Development conversations should also be driven by the employee and should be scheduled when they feel appropriate. In the example timeline described at the beginning of the directive, the development check-in happened at the third and/or fourth check-in, after the expectations and feedback check-ins.

Development conversations should not be a "one and done" conversation. They will likely be a series of meetings between managers and employees to craft and review the **Individual Development Plan**. Always keep in mind that development is a journey: you don't have to move straight to action.

Getting Started:

1. **Plan**. Development check-ins should be scheduled when the employee is ready to discuss development. Expectations and (at least one) Feedback check-ins must happen before the development check-in. Employees should review the **Development Discussion Guide** and **Individual Development Plan Worksheet (IDP)** prior to their scheduled meeting. Employees should reflect on the questions in the **IDP** and be prepared to discuss some ideas.
2. **Discuss**. Following the Development Discussion Guide, managers and employees discuss strengths, career goals, business needs, and plan of action. Managers should be careful to encourage and listen rather than direct and talk. Managers are responsible for providing business context and clarity, but don't expect to have all the answers.
3. **Review**. Schedule a follow-up meeting to review progress or to complete the IDP. Once the employee completes the IDP, try to review development plans every 3-6 months. Managers may also review developments plans with their department head for additional feedback or clarity.

4. **Submit**. Once every fiscal year, you will be asked to complete a development check-in survey in Paychex. This survey will answer if you have or have not had a development check-in this fiscal year. It will also allow both employee and manager to record any notes that they wish in Paychex.

Free Resources for Professional Development

- **Class Central**. Free online courses. Paid certificates offered. www.classcentral.com
- **edX**. Free online courses. Paid certificates and programs offered. www.edx.org
- **FutureLearn**. Free online courses. Paid subscriptions available. www.futurelearn.com
- **Udemy**. Free online courses. Paid certificates and programs offered. www.udemy.com