Performance Goals:
What They Are and How They're Written
Definitions

PERFORMANCE GOALS

Performance goals are written definitions of what you expect to accomplish within a given time period. Goals may relate to continuous job responsibilities, to specific one-time projects, to implementation of new services or operations, to plans for improvement of service or production, to learning a new job or developing a new skill. Some types of goals will be applicable every year; some will not. For each planning year, however, goals should encompass all major job responsibilities, all significant investments of time and energy, and all plans that require special allocation of time, funds, or personnel. Most goal statements will include desired result, performance indicators, and standards. Some goal statements will be accompanied by an action plan.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND STANDARDS

Indicators describe what is to be used as a measure of performance. Standards define the expected level of achievement. Measures of performance may be difficult to establish. They are often easier to define for jobs that are production oriented and for tasks where results can be described in terms of quantity, elapsed time, or accuracy. It is more difficult to set standards for providing services when the product is information or advice, the value of which varies according to the recipient—such as reference service, staff counseling, or consulting. You may not be satisfied with your first attempt at identifying indicators and standards, but you should describe as well as you can how the accomplishment of each goal can be measured or evaluated.

ACTION PLAN

An action plan outlines the steps to be taken to accomplish a goal, sets time for accomplishing each step, and establishes an expected completion date. It describes a series of activities that will result in the achievement of a performance goal. Action plans should accompany all problem-solving goals, innovative goals, and development goals—any goal that involves a limited time frame and a final result. Goals relating to routine, ongoing job responsibilities will not necessarily be accompanied by an action plan. At the time you are preparing your annual performance goals, you may know that you intend to carry out a particular project, but at that point may have only an indefinite idea of the steps required to accomplish it. In this case, you can simply indicate that a more complete action plan will be prepared by a certain date. The details can be written later.
Types of Goals

Although not all goals will fall neatly into a category, most can be identified as belonging to one of the following general types: maintenance, problem-solving, innovative, or developmental.

Maintenance

Maintenance goals are the major substance of your work and are the goals by which performance is most heavily judged. They should cover all primary ongoing job responsibilities and should, therefore, be related to your job description. These goals are likely to remain stable from one year to the next. The level of detail described by goal statements may differ according to job complexity and personal preference in stating them, but each primary responsibility should stand as a separate goal. Whenever possible, goals should be stated in terms of the desired result, not as an activity.

Examples of maintenance goals

Example #1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>goal</th>
<th>indicator</th>
<th>standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smooth work flow in the section, resulting in no backlog of work in one area causing insufficient or uneven workload in another area and maintenance of an average processing time of one week for all rush materials.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: This is a very compact goal statement, incorporating indicators and standards into a single sentence. This is a case where the goal may be easier to state than to accomplish.
Example #2:

A library instruction program that reaches all students in freshman English classes, in order to minimize the need for individual library assistance with course assignments.

NOTE: To "minimize" a need is still a fairly vague standard but it may be as close as you can get initially. It may also be considered in comparison to what the need was when there was no instruction program.

Example #3:

Maintain a positive relationship with school faculty.

Performance Indicators:

* invitations to participate on faculty committees
* receiving no complaints about quality or delivery of library service
* respond promptly to requests for new materials or information

NOTE: The first indicator lacks a quantitative standard--it is more a matter of yes or no, rather than how many.

From this example you can see that a standard may be a negative--in this case the lack of complaints. "Prompt" may seem too indefinite--you may wish to be more precise.
Example #4:
Assist users at the Reference Desk.

Performance Indicators:
* on duty as scheduled
* demonstrate knowledge of information resources
* demonstrate familiarity with library service policies and procedures
* exhibit good communication skills
* provide information within time limits set by requester
* receive expressions of satisfaction with service from requesters

NOTE: The standards in these last two examples demonstrate the variety of ways in which achievement of goals may be measured. In some cases, the standards are incorporated into a simple goal statement. In others, where there are numerous ways in which success might be measured, the indicators and standards have been expressed separately from the goal. In some cases, the standard has been precisely identified; in others, there are only indicators, and these may be one or more stops removed from direct measurement.

For instance, in the reference standards, it is not stated how knowledge of resources or communication skills are to be measured. Also, expressions of satisfaction from users are not a direct measurement of the accuracy or promptness of the information provided or the skill in locating it. But this may be as close as you can get—for now.
Problem Solving

Problem-solving goals often relate to continuing responsibilities. They may solve a specific problem or address a need to bring productivity or quality of service up to an established standard. You may have a goal to raise previously set standards, or even to establish a standard for the first time. What was a maintenance goal last year, may this year become a problem-solving goal. If the desired result is achieved, this same goal will revert to a maintenance goal again next year. Problem-solving goals should be accompanied by an action plan.

Examples of problem-solving goals

Example #1:
Achieve an approval plan profile that results in a return of 10% or less of materials received, and acquisition of 90% or more of appropriate titles in order to increase the efficiency of the approval program.

Action Plan:

1) meet with vendor representative to discuss current profile—December

2) review books received for following four months for relevance to profile; identify problem areas

3) revise profile as needed—April

4) review receipts against comprehensive checklist for coverage by approval plan

5) Modify profile as needed to achieve maximum return rate of 10% and minimum acquisition rate of 90%—July
Example #2:

New staff are able to work independently at established performance levels within six weeks of hire.

Action Plan:

1) review job requirements and determine areas for which training must be provided

2) identify objectives for training against specific tasks to be trained for and the estimated time for training

3) identify staff with whom new employees must meet to review department activities or to receive specific instruction

4) identify materials and resources needed for the training process

5) review basic training plan in relation to new employees' skills and experience

6) develop written training plan and schedule before person's first day of work

NOTE: This might be a maintenance goal, but as a problem-solving goal we assume it is establishing a procedure and level of performance not previously in effect.
Example #3:

Establish performance standards for online searchers in order to evaluate service and individual performance.

**Action Plan:**

1) draft guidelines for searcher appraisal and distribute to searcher--by January 31

2) put draft guidelines into effect--February

3) collect data on search performance--Winter, Spring terms

4) analyze data and establish recommended performance standards--Spring

**NOTE:** With problem-solving goals, the standard by which achievement is measured is often stated as the purpose or end result of the action. It often answers the question, "Why?"
Innovative goals are new plans, innovations, one-time efforts that require special planning. They may be undertaken for various reasons— to respond to changed users' needs, to take advantage of new technology, or to expand services. They often provide opportunities to be creative. Innovative goals should be challenging, should stretch the individual and should produce a significant result for the library. They should have a purpose, which should be included in the goal statement. Innovative goals need especially careful planning. Attention must be given to what resources will be required, what the costs will be, how long it will take, who will be involved, and what checkpoints along the way will be used to measure progress.

Performance on innovative goals is measured by the degree of success in completing on schedule the steps of an organized action plan and in achieving the desired result. However, the nature of the goals you set for yourself may be as important in the evaluation of performance as whether or not an individual goal is achieved. For example, the accomplishment of a plan to make a minor procedural change in unit operations may not be viewed as being of equal importance as a major innovation in the organization of the unit, even if unavoidable circumstances prevented completion of the latter by the projected date.

Examples of innovative goals

Example #1:
Establish faculty consultant program to provide subject expertise for collection development.

Action Plan:
1) identify departments to be included—February
2) request department chairman to appoint a consultant—March
3) follow up on non-respondents—April
4) develop outline for initial interviews with selectors—April
5) conduct interviews—April/May
6) have program fully in place—June
Example #2:

Have an online acquisitions system with fund account capability in place by May, in order to consolidate the ordering and payment processes for monographs and serials into one system and to provide adequate audit trails for University auditors and fund management reports for selectors and library administrators.

Action Plan:

1) establish objectives--September

2) review needs of selectors, administrators, auditor and acquisitions staff--September

3) identify possible systems and schedule site visits or vendor visits working with Associate Director for Technical Services and Head, Serials Division--October

4) review the systems' capabilities and gather any further information necessary from vendors--November

5) present a report to library administration identifying preferred system and justifying its selection over the systems--December

6) assist administration in preparing contracts and other documents necessary for purchase --December/ January

7) begin to plan implementation--March, etc. . .
Developmental

Developmental goals apply to an individual learning a new job or developing a new skill that will improve job performance. These goals, like problem-solving and innovative goals, should include action plans describing the steps to be taken, target dates, and levels of performance to be achieved.

Example of a developmental goal

Acquire knowledge of collection and skill in selecting materials for unit.

Action Plan:

1) review selection policy for collections --by September 15

2) evaluate approval receipts and information on new titles with supervisor--September 15/October 1

3) make selections independently and review with supervisor--October

4) assume responsibility--November 1

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Professional Contributions

You should also include goal statements covering major committees or other university library assignments that require a significant commitment of time. Appointments to university committees, task forces, or other bodies that make demands on time or resources should be included as well. A brief descriptive statement should be adequate. Unless you are the chairman, you will rarely have sufficient information to include an action plan. Professional commitments outside the university should, with rare exception, only be reported at the end of the year as documentation in support of promotion.
Special Problems

CHANGED PLANS

Unforeseen circumstances, intervening events, or unpredictable changes in priorities may make it necessary to revise goals throughout the year. Annual performance goals are not cast in stone, but changes and the reasons for them should be documented. In most cases, changes are noted during quarterly reviews.

DELEGATED RESPONSIBILITIES

Identifying delegated responsibilities can be difficult, but critical in defining personal responsibilities. Overlap should be avoided as much as possible. For example, if evaluation of instructional programs is the responsibility of the bibliographic instruction librarian, it cannot also be the responsibility of the unit head. A goal of the unit head might be to ensure that the evaluation process is included in all instructional programs. There are, of course, cases where certain responsibilities are truly identical. Several reference librarians or catalogers may share some of the same goals. Supervisors and managers will have goals in common, since they are each responsible for the effectiveness of those who report to them.

PERSONAL GOALS AND UNIT GOALS

Unit goals are often more global than personal goals. They relate to broader functions, services, and programs; and often involve more than one person. However, there will be times when unit goals are the responsibility of a single individual, and thus become coincident with personal goals. In other cases, several personal goals may represent fragments of a unit goal. The important thing is not so much that there be a precise distinction between personal and unit goals, but that they not be in conflict. And all unit goals should be accounted for in the personal goals of unit staff.
WHEN IS A GOAL NOT A GOAL?

It is not a goal

* when it is a job description. An itemized list of activities is not a set of goals. A goal is not what you do, but the result you want to achieve.

* when it is beyond your control. If you have not been given responsibility for the outcome, you should not write a goal for it.

* when it is someone else's responsibility.

* when it can be done quickly and with little effort. If it can be done next Tuesday morning, it is not a goal.

STEPS IN WRITING GOALS

1) Review your job description.
   * Is it complete? Is it accurate?
   * If not, bring it up to date, with your supervisor.

2) Write performance goals.
   a) Outline the major continuing responsibilities of your job in terms that express the results you want. These are your maintenance goals. Include for each, performance indicators and standards. Ask yourself:
      * Have I covered all of my job?
      * Have I covered only my job (not someone else's as well)?
      * Have I included management as well as technical and service responsibilities?
      * Have I described how each goal will be measured (indicators and standards)?
b) Write goals for specific projects, new programs, improvements, committee assignments, and professional development. Include for each of these an action plan outlining the steps to be taken to achieve the desired result. Ask yourself:

* Do these goals support unit goals?

* Are they worth doing?

* Are they challenging? Innovative? (not all will be)

* Are they realistic? Are the resources available? Do I have control over their accomplishment?

* Are action plans included--describing the major stops along the way, expected results, and completion dates?

3) Time to get on with the job!