



Representing the bargaining unit employees of Passport Services, a division of the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs

Haley Larkin and David Reimer
Acting Vice President and Acting Chief Steward
NFFE 1998 AFL-CIO, IAMAW
Phone # (520) 733 8216

Action Request

DATE: November 23, 2020

TO: Daniel Alessandrini, Director and Bradley Phillips, Division Chief, Office of Program Management and Operation Support

SUBJECT: The Union's proposal for 2020 Measurability.

On June 11, 2020, Passport Services was reclassified as Mission Critical staff, bringing hundreds of workers back into the workplace. Most of these workers had been out of the office since April 1st, while others were out for even longer.

For approximately 71 days, all Passport BUE were out of the office on Weather and Safety Leave due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While this was an extraordinary benefit to the BUE to stop the spread of the virus, it has left both BUE and Management in a dilemma on how to accurately account for the performance of BUEs for 2020.

Passport Specialists, like those in Management, strive for an Outstanding working performance because they are proud of the work they produce, work hard to accomplish the organization's mission, and create value at their respective agency through their diverse sets of skills and backgrounds. However, because of the pandemic, accurately capturing that in a Performance Review has become even more difficult.

The DS-7644 Civil Service Performance Plan and Appraisal form documents more than just the objective error and production rates of Critical Performance Element One. It also encompasses an employee's ability to achieve organizational results, demonstrates job knowledge, actively participate, and demonstrate teamwork, and showcase interpersonal and communication skills.

This is not the first time the Union has presented this topic with Management, however, the uncertainty of how they will be measured at the end of the year is creating additional stress to an already stress-ridden workplace in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

REFERENCES AND GUIDANCE

The Collective Bargaining Agreement:

Article 12 *NEGOTIATIONS DURING TERM OF THE MASTER AGREEMENT*

Article 18 *PERFORMANCE STANDARDS AND EVALUATION*

3 FAM 2820 *PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL SYSTEM FOR GENERAL SCHEDULE AND PREVAILING RATE EMPLOYEES.*

PROPOSED ACTION

The Union respectfully proposes the following solution to the 2020 Measurability dilemma:

All Passport Services BUE will be given the opportunity to opt-in or opt-out to being measurable for the 2020 rating period as long as they have worked the required minimum of 120 measurable hours and have been employed for longer than 120 days.

If they do not meet the required hours or days listed, they will be marked as unmeasurable in accordance with precedence. But they will also receive a generic COVID-19 statement to be inserted at the end of their Annual Performance Record following all the information the supervisor can provide on their work for all Critical Performance Elements. Additionally, this will not pertain to those still on their probationary status.

How the Union proposes to facilitate the task:

1. No later than December 1st, all Passport Specialists will be sent their Quality Production Report for the 2020 Performance rating period. This will include that individual's MIS statistics and Employee cumulative Error Rates Report.
2. An online form will be created and sent to all Passport Specialists through a SAFEAlert Message no later than December 7, 2020. The form will state the following:

For the appraisal period January 1, 2020, to December 31st, 2020 I select:

_____ For my measurable performance to be included in my Annual Performance Appraisal

_____ For my measurable performance to not be included in my Annual Performance and to have the COVID-19 Generic Statement included along with my other performance evaluation statements, if applicable.

I understand that this selection cannot be changed once submitting this form and this decision is purely my own.

3. Passport Specialists must complete the form by December 11, 2020, at the close of business depending on the shift and time zone they are assigned to.
4. Supervisors will receive a 15-day extension for filing the Annual Performance Evaluations for those who have opted into being measurable.
5. The Union and Management will work jointly on crafting the generic COVID-19 statement(s) to be inserted into all applicable BUEs performance appraisals.

JUSTIFICATION

After surveying many BUEs on their thoughts on measurability, it became clear that there was not a consensus of what the right approach would be. Four options emerged from these discussions. One of them, which the Union finds the most promising to satisfy the majority of Passport Specialists is listed above for the proposed action. The other three options include:

1. No one is measurable.
2. Everyone is measurable if they have been employed for longer than 120 days and have more than 120 measurable hours of work.
3. Those out of the office for more than 180 days are not measurable, while everyone else is fully measurable.

Unlike the proposed plan, these three options would disadvantage many specialists in different ways. By counting all Passport Specialists measurable, all employees have considerably less time to fulfill the requirements of all 5 Critical Performance Elements. Those who were out of the office until November 16th, have very little opportunity to prove their performance to their supervisors. They are also at a disadvantage if they had an error within the first three months of the year and have not had the work, they would have normally had to overcome that error.

On the other hand, by counting all Passport Service BUE as unmeasurable for the 2020 year, those who returned on June 11th who have more than enough time to show the value of their work are left with the sentiment that the hard work they performed to decrease the backlog of over 1.6 million passport applications, was virtually for nothing and not appreciated. Additionally, by not being measurable, this blocks the ability for BUE to qualify for Quality Step Increases (QSIs) for the 2020 performance period. Bureau of Consular Affairs has in years past had a disproportionately low number of QSIs allocated to BUE in comparison to other Bureaus within the State Department. This would further increase the disparate awarding of QSIs within Passport Services.

While the last option listed may seem like the appropriate answer, many BUE expressed that this year was full of stressors that had crept into their work. Their numbers were lower than years past and the social distancing necessity curtailed their ability to truly help their team by mentoring or promoting an inviting and inclusive work environment. Additionally, many specialists reported that they wanted to help their fellow specialists acclimate as they knew the supervisors and upper management would have their hands tied with the increased number of audits. However, they have hesitated because they must also worry about their own performance evaluation since they are unsure of how the year will conclude. For those reasons, they wished that it would be a choice to be measurable.

The end of the year is quickly approaching, as well as the deadline for these Annual Performance Reviews to be submitted. The Union urges Management to consider this proposal and for further discussion on how to best acknowledge the hard work while not negatively impacting the careers of those who were hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

National Officers, NFFE, Local 1998 AFL-CIO, IAMAW