

Performance Improvement Plan

Best Practices

NPTC has compiled the following tips for writing Performance Improvement Plans to help ensure that each plan is a meaningful tool for addressing problematic behavior.

Language

In general, try to use language that promotes the Performance Improvement Plan as a genuine opportunity for the intern's growth rather than a punishment-based consequence. Interns who view their Performance Improvement Plan as an opportunity for growth, rather than undue punishment or criticism, are more likely to benefit from the plan. Promoting the plan as an opportunity for growth might include setting aside time to ensure the intern has buy-in to the growth-based plan, as well as describing problem behaviors as behaviors the intern might be struggling with in a particular moment rather than as inherent aspects of their personality. You may also want to avoid frequently referring to the intern by their first name in the Performance Improvement Plan as this might feel like accusatory language to the intern. Refer to them as "the intern" or "the trainee" instead.

Setting achievable goals

When offering an expectation for an acceptable performance, it is important to provide specific goals the intern can reasonably attain. (Think SMART goals, i.e. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely.) For example, it is better to list "the intern will respond to emails within 24-hours" as an expectation for acceptable performance rather than "the intern will respond to emails in a more timely manner" since "within 24-hours" informs the intern of the site's expectation for what constitutes "a more timely manner." The intern can then take action steps toward attaining acceptable performance in, for this example, communication and timeliness.

Helping the intern meet the goals

Include any action steps that supervisors or other staff members will take to help the intern meet the goals of the Performance Improvement Plan. If an intern is not completing reports on time, for instance, a supervisor might ask to review initial drafts of test reports every two weeks to assist the intern in attaining an acceptable performance. List any additional resources available to interns that might help them attain an acceptable performance. Remember that performance improvement is a collaborative process and supervisors have the responsibility to ensure optimal training opportunities and resources in order for interns to meet their Performance Improvement Plan goals.

Measuring acceptable performance

Explain how the intern will know if they are making progress toward meeting the goal of the Performance Improvement Plan. Tell the intern when they will be evaluated on their progress and what will be measured at the evaluation meeting. If communication and timeliness are being evaluated, for example, tell the intern that their ability to respond to emails within 24-hours over a four-week period will be measured at an evaluation meeting. Set clear next-steps for further performance improvement if the initial goals are not met at the evaluation meeting.

Finalizing a Performance Improvement Plan

It is best to review the Performance Improvement Plan with the intern in an evaluation meeting every three-weeks to one-month until the intern is no longer on the plan. It is not a good idea to set the end of the intern's Performance Improvement Plan to be the end of internship, as this will not result in timely performance improvement and could make the intern feel discouraged at the thought of being on a performance improvement plan for a good portion if not the majority of their internship. The final review deadline of the Performance Improvement Plan should also take place before the intern's final evaluation is due so that the final evaluation can accurately reflect the intern's progress toward proficiency in the profession-wide competencies after they have completed their Performance Improvement Plan. The final review deadline of the Performance Improvement Plan should therefore occur *before* the end internship and *before* the due date of the intern's final evaluation.