

## Ratings Definitions and Guidelines

### *Northwestern Performance Excellence*

Assigning ratings thoughtfully is an essential part of Performance Excellence. This guide provides information about:

- Principles of rating
- Detail on each rating level
- Key messages for staff within the performance conversation, based on rating

**Ready to login?**  
[learn.northwestern.edu](https://learn.northwestern.edu)

**Access additional tools and resources:**  
[perform.northwestern.edu](https://perform.northwestern.edu)

**Help:** For policy and process questions, contact your unit's HR Administrator.  
For technical support: 847-491-4357 (1-HELP) or [consultant@northwestern.edu](mailto:consultant@northwestern.edu)

## Rating Principles

- The vast majority of Northwestern staff want to be here and make meaningful contributions. Every staff member has room to improve, and benefits from knowing where they stand.
- Ratings are based on annual performance. No one should be entitled to a high rating or doomed to a low rating based on prior years' performance.
- Ratings should be a summary of feedback throughout the year. Supervisors and staff communicating frequently should have a shared understanding of ongoing performance and development. The year-end process should hold no surprises.
- New hires or staff members new to their role should be rated against their expected progress in learning the role, not against being fully capable in the role.
- Ratings should accurately reflect a staff member's contribution. They should not be used as a punishment, a way to avoid conflict, or as a substitute for other rewards.
- Expectations should increase every year. Doing the same things the same way without focusing on continuously improving should not merit the same rating year after year. This is true even for staff whose core responsibilities remain largely the same year-to-year.

## Rating Detail



### Role Model

Few staff (5%) are **Role Models**. This rating is reserved for those few staff who made a profound impact this year.

- Consistently went way beyond core job responsibilities.
- Exceeded all expectations and goals, making a profound impact on school/unit and University beyond what was planned.
- Demonstrated Northwestern Values in an exemplary way and modeled the values for others.
- Ready for expanded or new responsibilities.
- **Not recommended for new hires or new to role.**



### Excelling

Some staff (25-30%) are **Excelling** and made a significant impact this year.

- Went above and beyond core job responsibilities.
- Exceeded expectations and goals, making a significant impact on school/unit beyond what was planned.
- Demonstrated Northwestern Values in an exemplary way.
- May be ready for new or expanded responsibilities.
- **For new hires or new to role:** progressed significantly faster than expected.



### Achieving

Many staff (55-65%) are **Achieving** and made a solid impact this year.

- Fulfilled core job responsibilities.
- Achieved goals, making a solid impact on school/unit.
- Demonstrated Northwestern Values consistently.
- Showed personal growth.
- **For new hires or new to role:** progressed as expected.



### Development Needed

Few staff (5-10%) made a limited impact this year, and there is **Development Needed** in one or more areas under review. This rating is appropriate when one or more of the following statements apply:

- Did not consistently fulfill core job responsibilities.
- Did not consistently meet expectations and goals.
- Did not consistently demonstrate Northwestern Values.
- Did not show much personal growth.
- **For new hires or new to role:** progressed slower than expected.



### Corrective Action

Very few staff are in a formal **Corrective Action** process.

- Failed to improve despite ongoing efforts to address performance issues.

## Key Messages for Staff

### Role Model

- Affirm contributions, identify what they did and how they did it and the impact created that led to the staff member's Role Model rating.
- Emphasize that not many individuals receive this rating. "You were one of the school's or unit's highest performers this year."
- Manage expectations – Role Model is a special rating reserved for profound, transformational impact. Staff members may not receive a Role Model rating in years where opportunities to leverage their strengths or reach stretch goals don't come along.

### Excelling

- Affirm contributions, identify what they did and how they did it and the impact created that led to staff member's Excelling rating.
- This is a great rating, indicating above average performance.
- If they ask "why not Role Model?" - Excelling is about significant impact, while Role Model indicates profound or transformational impact (often beyond scope of role or department). The difference between Excelling and Role Model may depend on what opportunities arise for an individual to take on additional responsibilities in a given year.

### Achieving

- Achieving is a very good rating and means you are a strong performer. It does not mean average and/or middle of the road.
- Highlight strengths and significant accomplishments.
- Discuss ways the staff member may seize more opportunities to make a contribution within the scope of their current role.

### Development Needed

- Identify gaps in staff member accomplishments, skills and/or behaviors and their impact on the organization.
- Provide a positive message about the opportunity to close the gap, meeting the expectations for the role.
- Put the staff member in the driver's seat for closing gaps, with your help and support.