



EXECUTIVE BRANCH PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL AND MERIT PAY SYSTEM GUIDELINES

Department of Human Resources

Version Updates	Date Updates Posted for Countywide Access	Revision Contributor/Owner
August 2025	Removal of Dept. Dir. From merit-over-top exclusion. Appendix link updates.	Grey Lewis, DHR/CCS
August 2017	Posted to HRD website: August 21, 2017	Grey Lewis, HR Analytics & Systems Manager
October 2021	Section 2.3. Updated reference of exclusions of Appointed leaders from merit-over-top eligibility.	Grey Lewis, HR Analytics & Systems Manager
July 2023	Section 2.3. Removed exclusion for Appointed leaders for merit-over-top eligibility	Denise Pruitt, Chief of Policy & Legislation Grey Lewis, HR Analytics & Systems Manager

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION 1.	INTRODUCTION	3
SECTION 2.	KING COUNTY CODE AND EMPLOYEES COVERED	3-4
SECTION 3.	WHEN TO HOLD PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS	4
SECTION 4.	SCORING, MERIT AWARDS AND APPEALS	5-6
APPENDICES	A. PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL AND MERIT PAY COMPENSATION CROSSWALK	7-8
	B. EPAS YEAR-IN-REVIEW FORM	8
	C. PERFORMANE APPRAISAL SCHEDULE	8
	D. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS.....	8
	E. HRD WEBSITE FOR EPAS TOOLS AND RESOURCES	8

SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF GUIDEBOOK

The performance appraisal and merit pay system promotes communication about work performance between supervisors and employees, and ongoing employee development. This guidebook ensures that directors, managers and supervisors have correct, up-to-date instructions in applying the current merit pay processes contained in the King County Code.

Regardless of whether employees are covered under the County's Merit Pay Plan, all employees should be given clear expectations and standards for performance, receive regular, ongoing feedback on their performance, and discuss progression towards achievement of a development plan.

What form agencies use to capture feedback is less critical than engaging in communication with the employee about their performance and development. This guidebook provides information on requirements of the Merit Pay Plan. Use of the following tools and guidance will help agencies develop a meaningful feedback approach.

1.2 CRITERIA

Performance evaluations are based on individualized, position-specific performance elements.

Completed appraisal forms are kept in the employee's personnel file.

A completed appraisal is required for an employee to be eligible for a merit increase. Appraisals must meet the following criteria:

- They must be written.
- They must indicate clearly overall performance.
- They must provide for employee feedback.

SECTION 2. KING COUNTY CODE AND EMPLOYEES COVERED

King County's merit pay system is governed by the [King County Code, Chapter 3.15](#) -- Pay Plan and Classification of Positions, which authorizes merit payment according to performance level and current step in the pay range.

2.1 EMPLOYEES COVERED

The Merit Pay Plan applies to approximately 2,000 positions in the Executive-Branch departments including employees in the following separately elected agencies:

- Department of Assessments
- Department of Elections

2.2 EMPLOYEES NOT COVERED

- Employees on a fixed progression step plan or single-wage rate
- Term-Limited Temporary employees. Refer to the [Contingent Workforce Manual](#) for separate pay procedures covering TLTs.
- Short-Term Temporary employees
- Fellows and interns
- Work Study students

2.3 COVERED BY THE MERIT PAY SYSTEM, BUT NOT ELIGIBLE FOR MERIT INCREASES

- Employees who are currently serving a probationary period (except for employees who are serving a probation following a lateral transfer);
- Employees who have completed their probationary period less than three calendar months prior to the effective date of the increases (completion on or before July 31 for some union members, completion on or before September 30 for most participating groups); and
- In general, the merit award system affects non-represented King County Career Service and regular Career Service Exempt employees; however, employees represented by unions may participate in the merit award process, subject to provisions negotiated in their respective bargaining agreements.

SECTION 3. WHEN TO HOLD PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS

TIMING

An employee performance review of all eligible employees is conducted each fall (this does not include employees currently serving probation). Depending on the organization, this review may cover performance for the previous six months (March-August) or for the previous year (September-August). If the performance appraisal is for a different period, this is to be indicated on the Performance Appraisal form.

The default performance appraisal review period is September 1 through August 31.

Although this appraisal process results in a final review year-end report, the expectation is that supervisors and managers will have periodic check-ins with their employees to assess their development and performance. HRD recommends holding formalized check-ins quarterly.

SECTION 4. SCORING, merit awards AND APPEALS

4.1 HOW TO APPLY STEP INCREASES

See Appendix A – PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL AND COMPENSATION CROSSWALK.

4.2 SCORING CONSISTENCY

Within each department and division, consistency is required to ensure equitable treatment. It is recommended that supervisors and managers within divisions discuss and have a consensus of what “outstanding” work looks like, as well as to identify standards for other rating levels and a consistent approach to awarding step increases.

4.3 ABILITY TO EARN MORE THAN ONE STEP INCREASE

Under [KCC 3.15.020\(4\)](#), the appointing authority is able to grant multiple step increases for employees participating in the County’s performance appraisal system. In awarding additional step increases, be mindful of how such increases might impact your agencies’ internal salary equity and alignment, including those employees not eligible for a step increase. This flexibility to grant multiple step increases does not apply to employees who are eligible for multiple step increases through their collective bargaining agreement (for example, those that move two steps annually through their salary range.)

*Appointing Authority means the county council, the executive, chief officers of executive departments and administrative offices, or division managers having authority to appoint or to remove persons from positions in the county service.
[K.C.C. 3.12.010 (B)]*

4.4 RESULTS AND MERIT AWARDS

Notifying Employees of Results

Do not inform any employee that he or she will receive a merit raise until your department has determined that such increases will be granted, including a fiscal review authorization.

Employees who will receive a merit increase should be informed in writing of the step change and effective date. Personalized letters to those not receiving awards should also be written to tell them that, even though they will receive no increase, their work is recognized and appreciated. To receive a merit increase, there needs to be a complete, documented performance evaluation for the eligible employee approved by the department director or designee and maintained in the employee’s personnel file.

4.5 APPEALS

The employee may request to meet with the supervisor's superior for a review of the performance appraisal. Once the appeal process has been completed, scores are finalized and a report which assigns step increases is submitted.

The *King County Personnel Guidelines, Section 15.3*, provides for appeals as follows:

A. Within **five working days** after a copy of the performance appraisal form is given to the employee, the employee may request additional review and consideration by their division director (or, where the employee's supervisor is the division director, the department director). The employee should prepare a written request, which includes the following elements:

- Identify the appraisal by date, the name of the evaluator, and the date the appraisal was received.
- Specify the ratings or comments that the employee believes are incorrect.
- State the ratings or comments the employee believes should be made on the appraisal.
- Give facts substantiating each change requested.
- Keep a copy of the written request and send the original to the division (or department) director.

B. Upon receiving the request, the division (or department) director will have **15 calendar days** to meet with the employee. The division (or department) director will either sustain or change the performance appraisal and notify the employee of the decision in writing. In case of a change to the appraisal, a copy of the revised appraisal is to be included with the decision.

C. If the issue is not resolved by the division director, the employee may, **within 15 calendar days** of the meeting with the division director, meet with the department director, who will notify the employee of the decision in writing. The department director's decision to sustain or change the performance appraisal will be final.

4.6 EFFECTIVE DATES FOR MERIT PAY CHANGES

All eligible employees may expect to receive merit pay increases in their pay checks issued the first full pay period that includes January 1, or if represented under a collective bargaining agreement, in accordance with the provisions of the agreement.

APPENDIX A - PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL AND COMPENSATION CROSSWALK

If an employee is currently at this step		And receives one of these ratings			The employee can earn this
Employee's Current Step	EPAS RATING*	NUMERIC EQUIVALENT	K.C.C. PROVISION	CODE PROVIDED POSSIBLE STEPS	
Step 1 – 4	Meets Expectations	3.0000 – 3.9999	Standard Performance	Single Step	
Step 1 – 4	Exceeds Expectations	4.0000 – 4.2499	Above-Standard Performance or higher	One or More Steps	
Step 5 – 7	Exceeds Expectations	4.0000 – 4.2499	Above-Standard Performance or higher	One or More Steps	
• Moving more than one step requires a rating of 'High Performance/Outstanding', otherwise only one step is permitted.					
Step 8 – 9	High Performance	4.2500 – 5.0000	Outstanding Performance	Single Step	
• Moving from step 8 to 9; or from step 9 to 10 requires High Performance Rating					
Step 10 (or MOT)	High Performance	4.2500 – 5.0000	Outstanding Performance	Up to 5%	
• Merit increases above step 10 (or top step) require that the employee be at the top step for two consecutive years and score outstanding (high performance) both years. To maintain that above-step 10 rating, the employee must be continuously outstanding in performance for the entire rating period. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employees must be at top step two years prior to the effective date of the merit-over-top. By example, an employee must have been at step 10 effective 1/1/2015 to be eligible for merit-over-top effective 1/1/2017.					

For employees currently at step 10, King County Code 3.15.020(3) further provides for Merit-over-Top (MOT). The appointing authority has the ability to grant MOT of 2.5% or 5% above the top step of the range for a period of 12 months if all the following conditions are met:

- The employee has been at the top step of the prior or current range for two years before the award of the increase; and
- The employee has demonstrated continuous outstanding performance (EPAS = High Performance) throughout the rating period.
 - Employees are required to receive a High Performance (Outstanding) rating to receive and “re-earn” merit-over-top each year. If an employee has previously earned merit-over-top in their position and then scores below High Performance for a review year, the employee will lose their merit-over-top for that merit year. If the employee then completes a

following review year with a High Performance, the employee is not required to wait two years to “re-earn” merit.

Eligibility for movement through salary range and merit-over-top are superseded by union contract(s).

Please consult the appropriate union contract regarding performance appraisals and step increases.

APPENDIX B - [PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL FORM](#)

APPENDIX C – [EPAS FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS](#)

APPENDIX D – [DHR INTRANET SITE FOR EPAS TOOLS AND RESOURCES](#)