



Commissioned Officers' Effectiveness Report (COER)

Overview of COERs

As the major source of information concerning an officer's performance, the annual Commissioned Officers' Effectiveness Report (COER) is one of the most important documents in the career of PHS officers. The COER is reviewed and consulted whenever an officer is considered for promotion, assimilation, awards, and reassignments. All of these actions are competitive, so it is critical that your COER accurately reflects your performance.

The COER is distributed electronically each year at least one month before its due date; and must be completed and submitted online at <http://dcp.pcs.gov>. The complete COER consists of Form 838, Attachment 1 (completed by the officer), and Attachment 2 (completed by the officer's Rater or supervisor).

COER's and Promotion

A promotion board is convened to consider all officers eligible for temporary and permanent promotions within a category. These promotion boards consist of five O-6 level officers who to the extent possible are representative of the category in terms of agency/program distribution, specialty, race/ethnicity, and gender; and contain at least one officer assigned outside of the Washington, D.C. area. Board members are instructed to base their rankings only on information documented in an officer's eOPF. For this reason, officers are reminded to be consistent in updating their eOPF by providing accurate and current information (e.g., annual Curriculum Vitae). In their review of officers being considered for promotion, Promotion Boards are guided by the precepts that DCP publishes each year. Starting in Promotion Year 2004 (PY04), a "Reviewing Official Statement" or ROS was initiated as an item for consideration under the "Performance" Precept and used to evaluate officers on the following:

- Performance as reflected by the **COER** with emphasis on the past 5 years;
- Career potential as reflected by performance and responsibility;
- Career progression as reflected by assignments with increased responsibility;
- Public Health Service awards and other achievements or recognition;
- Mobility defined as (a) assumption of new duties in a different geographic region; or (b) a change in programmatic responsibility within a duty station ; and
- Reviewing Official Statement

Revised weighting of existing precepts and/or the inclusion of new precepts may be considered. However, it is expected that the **COER** will remain the major factor weighted in determining an officer's performance. Boards can only consider information in the eOPF. Therefore, it is imperative that the eOPF contain information pertinent to the precepts. Extraneous information works against an officer because the Board needs to sift through their eOPF in search of relevant materials. *Thoroughly prepared COERs and a current CV are central to the decision-making process of the Boards.*

Getting Ready for your COER

COERs should be prepared for well in advance. The officer should anticipate the writing of the narrative by tracking his/her accomplishments and impacts throughout the year. The officer's supervisor should also be brought into the process early in the rating period. The USPHS rating system is considerably different from the civilian system. Therefore, it is particularly critical to bring civilian rating officials into the process early.

• Helpful Hint:

- i. Keep a weekly log of accomplishments to complete the COER
- ii. Meet with management regularly to explain the COER system and to clarify expectations of the desired outcomes

Whether you are facing your first COER or have experienced many with the same or with different raters, keep in mind that mismatched expectations can be a problem. Your job expectations and those of your supervisor should agree. Any disagreements should not be discovered at COER time! Constant communication, feedback, guidance, learning and education between you and your rater is vital.

Supervisors who are unfamiliar with the PHS evaluation procedure and system frequently rate officers. As a result, an officer may receive a lower rating than his or her peers for a comparable performance. This could ultimately and unfairly translate into a career penalty. To obtain a fair rating, the officer should make certain that the reviewing officials understand the PHS system, duties, and responsibilities. It would be wise to ensure that your supervisor has a copy of CCPM Pamphlet No. 58, "A Supervisor's Guide to the Commissioned Personnel System". The following suggestions may benefit PHS officers being evaluated in PHS or non-PHS positions, by Commissioned Corps or Civil Service supervisors. The basic idea is to avoid year-end COER surprises.

- At the beginning of each evaluation period, review the responsibilities of the position and the rater's expectations for the year. Most OPDIVs have established performance standards for Civil Service employees. Although the standards do not apply to PHS officers, they can form the basis for discussions.
- Regularly meet with the rater to discuss your performance to date. Such meetings allow you and the rater to identify any weaknesses or challenges and to implement corrective actions, thus avoiding a negative impact on your evaluation. During these sessions you may wish to present a summary sheet of your activities. The importance of an atmosphere of cooperation in these meetings

cannot be overemphasized. Informal meetings, perhaps quarterly, in an atmosphere of shared learning exchanges are the objective.

- Explain the COER form to the rater and the reviewer if they are unfamiliar with it. If performance standards are used, discuss the relationship of each standard to the components of the COER. A non-CO rater may need to have the potential impact of the COER on your career reinforced.
- Provide standard or average scores for the Scientist category. This gives the rater a basis for your rating and reduces the possibility of an evaluation that is skewed because the rater took the system too literally. Check with your Commissioned Corps Agency Liaison or Scientist Staffing Officer for guidance.
- Complete the officer section of the COER in detail (bullet format, using additional 1-page, Attachment 1) to indicate major duties and accomplishments throughout the rating period. It is useful to present the COER Attachment to the rater with the COER. The attachment serves as a reminder of your activities over the rating period and should reflect the impact your accomplishments have had on program goals and mission. This section is also used to briefly state your goals for future assignments and career direction.
- The rater completes a narrative or detailed COER and Attachment II. If the rater has been your supervisor for less than 6 months he/she may complete either a Narrative or Detailed COER. If the time supervised is six months or greater, a detailed COER must be completed. When completing PHS Form 838, written comments are required for items scored "A". Ask that your rater provide substantive comments on every item. One word comments or reiteration of the text in the COER questions are not as helpful to Boards as are comments that use examples specific to you. Attachment II must be included with the PHS Form 838. Raters should understand that written comments may be the deciding factor for Promotion Board members reviewing officers that have very similar COER scores. It might be useful to give the rater names and telephone numbers of colleagues, clients, or customers with whom the rater can discuss your performance. These could be provided with your COER Attachment and a more extensive summary of activities.

These suggestions, while valid and useful, are no substitute for frequent, open discussion with the rater. Good communication between raters and officers ensures fair performance evaluations.

COER Scoring

- COER calculations are performed using the following values for graded elements. E is the highest and A the lowest. The grades have numerical scores associated with them, (E = 100, D = 80, C = 60, B = 40, and A= 20). However, the numerical counterpart to the A/E scoring system is for all practical purposes invisible to the officer. Narrative COERs only receive a letter score to determine

“Satisfactory” or “Unsatisfactory” performance as denoted by the Rating Official in Topic # 18.

Due Dates for COERs

The dates for the rating period have changed in recent years. The rating period now follows the US Government’s fiscal year (October 1 –September 30). Dates change from year to year, but typically the officer should have his or her Attachment 1 filed and sent to his rater within the first two weeks of the new fiscal year. The rater has an additional time of approximately 2 weeks to get Attachment 2 to the reviewing official, and the reviewing official has typically 2 weeks to sign.

Suggestions for Attachment 1

Attachment 1 is a one-page document completed by the officer and utilized by the Rater (immediate or first-line supervisor) during the review and rating process. It is intended to give the Rater an accurate, concise picture of the officer’s duties, accomplishments, and goals. In addition, it can provide information related to officership, leadership, and force readiness as they relate to the officer’s job and additional responsibilities and activities as a Commissioned Corps officer. In particular, it has been observed that promotion boards often refer to this Attachment to give them a better understanding and appreciation of what an officer does that expands on the narrative of the billet. A more expanded version of this information should be placed in the curriculum vitae for review by various boards and hiring authorities.

Please remember that the primary purpose of Attachment 1 is to provide the Rater with information about the officer’s duties, accomplishments and goals. As the officer writes the narrative or bullets covering these areas, they should insert a few statements regarding leadership, officership, and force readiness; however, these areas should not be the primary focus of the Attachment 1 narrative.

Duties, Accomplishments, and Goals: These sections of Attachment 1 have been discussed many times, and will not be addressed here. It is sufficient to say they should be written so that the Rater can easily use them as a reference in scoring and commenting on the COER.

Officership: A universal definition of officership is not available. Some sources have explained “officership” as the essence of being an officer, an expectation to use professional judgment, the possession of moral fiber and values, and the relationship between service, the Corps, and society. Flag Officers in other uniformed services have defined officership as a blend of leadership, management, and professionalism – a balance of the motivational needs of the followers and the needs of the organization.

For the Commissioned Corps, characteristics of officership include:

- (1) knowledge, skills, expertise as a public health professional;
- (2) commitment to a common mission;
- (3) core values (loyalty, duty, selfless sacrifice, integrity); and
- (4) competence, both as a technical expert and as a professional officer.

Although all four are important, for this purpose, the officer should focus on indicators of officership that express contributions made to the Commissioned Corps and the professionalism of being a Commissioned Corps officer in the U.S. Public Health Service. Some examples include:

- recruiting activities – Associate Recruiter, school visits, recruiting booths
- actions demonstrating capabilities as a public health professional
- commitment to mission – for both the OPDIV and the Corps
- actions demonstrating competence – for both OPDIV responsibilities and those related to the Corps
- mentoring – Mentoring Program, mentoring OPDIV peers
- participation – on PACs, COA branches, professional organizations, community service organizations, OPDIV committees and workgroups
- teaching – precepting students, fellows, & Jr COSTEPs; adjunct professor; BLS instructor; local brown bag lectures, guest lecturer, agency teaching and education etc
- presentations – at institutional, local, regional, national, or international forums
- publications – in institutional, Commissioned Corps, or profession's media – always identifying oneself as a member of the USPHS Commissioned Corps
- uniform wear – every day to work, during presentations, while teaching, while attending professional meetings.
- observing uniformed service protocol
- completing BOTC, IOTC, OBC – acknowledging the Corps' history; embracing the Corps' corporate culture

Leadership: Most members of the Corps think of themselves as leaders. Through various avenues, they have been taught and have learned leadership skills. However, just knowing leadership skills, without putting them into practice, does not make us leaders. While the potential may exist, leadership must be exhibited and demonstrated in order to be recognized by others. In a recent study by the Army War College, the following attributes of a leader were listed (in order of importance).

- keeps cool under pressure
- clearly explains missions, standards, and priorities
- sees the big picture, providing context and perspective
- makes tough, sound decisions on time
- adapts quickly to new situations; can handle bad news
- gives useful feedback
- sets a high ethical tone
- is positive, encouraging, and realistically optimistic

Attachment 1 should reflect these and other attributes of a leader. Rather than simply restating the attributes above, the officer should think about how their actions exemplify these distinguishing characteristics. For example, how did they respond to a stressful situation? Do they provide strategic vision to their Team/Clinic/Program/Office? Have

they led their group through a restructuring/significant program change? Have they been able to come up with solutions to new situations/challenges?

Additionally, the officer could address:

- any leadership positions held in their job assignments
- leadership roles for collateral duties, committees, PACs, organizations.
- leadership training they have completed
- leadership roles assigned during deployments
- difficult assignments accepted that required them to exhibit leadership attributes

Force Readiness: This particular responsibility has been addressed by many Corps leaders in a broad variety of venues. Readiness and response by our officers is a part of any transformed and vital Commissioned Corps.

In order to address this in Attachment 1, an officer may wish to highlight two or three items from the following:

- Current readiness status (e.g., meet Basic Readiness)
- Historical readiness status (i.e., OFRD roster since 2003, DMAT member 1995-2000/CCRF/OFRD roster since 2002, etc)
- Special training received related to readiness
- Recognition for Readiness (i.e., FMRB – 2002, NEPA- 2003, etc)
- Response participation and role (i.e., for OFRD missions, NDMS missions, and the officer's agency response mission)
- Temporary Duty Assignments taken on behalf of the OPDIV