

Writing a Successful Performance Agreement

I Carefully consider the institutional goal.

Generally speaking, a GOAL is a concise statement that describes a particular purpose or aim to be achieved.

- A. Select a stretch goal.** The Board has made clear its desire that all institutional goals be “stretch” goals. Examples of definitions of “stretch goal” include the following:
- A stretch goal is a dream with a deadline
 - A stretch goal communicates that maintaining the status quo is not an option – the goal cannot be met by tweaking the existing system.
 - A stretch goal is an ambitious goal that you don’t know how to reach. Stretch goals force us to discard comfortable solutions and adopt new solutions.

B. Narrow the goal. Do not simply repeat the Regents’ System Goal; the Regents’ System Goal is intended to be extremely broad. Narrow the goal and make it very specific to fit your institution’s purpose. Examples follow.

1. For example, consider *Regents’ System Goal D: Targeted Access; Institutions will increase participation of under-served populations in postsecondary education and organized lifelong learning activities.*

A well-phrased institutional goal should:

- Define the underserved population(s)
- Define participation (enrollment, retention, graduation, etc)
- Define postsecondary education and organized lifelong learning activities (degree programs, self-enrichment activities, etc)

2. As another example, consider *Regents’ System Goal B: Learner Outcomes; Institutions will facilitate improved learner outcomes in competency areas where Kansas needs to advance.*

A well-phrased institutional goal should:

- Define learner outcome(s)
- Define the competency area(s) selected for emphasis

C. Avoid linking processes to goals. The goal should focus on performance outcomes, not on the particular process selected to achieve the outcome. (During its deliberations, the Performance Agreement Task Force made a conscious decision NOT to include “process” as a formal part of the performance agreement. The rationale was that an institution may discover that their process was not as effective as hoped; the institution therefore might have to change processes to achieve the desired performance outcome.)

If information about institutional processes is important to understanding of the performance agreement, include necessary information under the “comments” section of the application.

The following table illustrates specific goals vs vague goals.

Strive for specific goals such as these:	Avoid vague goals and process goals such as these:
Increase Hispanic enrollment and retention in degree programs. (Goal D)	Improve programs for underserved students
Improve student success from the completion of a developmental math and English course to the subsequent college level course. (Goal B)	Implement a summer program for developmental students.
Increase pass rates on national certification/licensure exams in health care fields. (Goal B)	Improve student success.

II. Select the key performance indicator (data) carefully.

The key performance indicator is a *measurement* or a *data element*. Unlike a goal, the key performance indicator itself conveys *no value judgments* and *no purpose*. The key performance indicator will dictate the targets for the next three years.

A. **Avoid confusion between goals and indicators.** The following table shows examples of confusion between goals and indicators that were encountered in the first “round” of performance agreements.

Strive for A precise description of a key performance indicator that clearly indicates the data to be collected	Avoid A “key performance indicator” statement that confuses goals and indicators and that provides little information about the data to be collected.
Percent of students on probation during the academic year.	Measure and improve student learning.
Percent of referrals filled by the Office of Rural Health	Help provide health care professionals to underserved areas of the state.
Fall-to-fall retention of first-time, full-time freshmen	Increase retention

B. **Indicators should be performance outcomes** (not process outcomes) whenever possible; **indicators should be direct measures** of the outcome whenever possible. For example, addressing the Regents’ System Goal of Targeted Participation requires a direct measure of participation of underserved populations (such as enrollment, retention, graduation rate, etc).

1. Example: “Establishment of a particular program for Hispanic students,” for example, only meets the Regents’ System Goal D to the extent that the program improves outcomes for the underserved population. Therefore, establishment of a program for

Hispanic students is a process outcome, not a performance outcome. The performance outcome(s) could be: enrollment, number of students on probation, retention, graduation rates, etc.

2. Example: “The number of alternative teaching methods used” only meets Regents System Goal B to the extent that learner outcomes are improved. Therefore, the number of alternative teaching methods used is a process outcome, not a performance outcome. Performance outcome(s) could be: retention rates, graduation rates, pass rates, success rates (number of students receiving A, B, or C) etc.

The following table shows examples of confusion between process outcomes and performance outcomes that were encountered in the first “round” of performance agreements.

Strive for Performance Outcomes	Avoid Process Outcomes
Enrollment of Hispanic students (Goal D)	Number of recruiting events in Hispanic areas (Goal D)
Pass rates of developmental math and English students (Goal B)	Establishment of a minimum score for entry into college level math and English courses (Goal B)
Average score on capstone experience (Goal B)	Number of faculty participating in professional development workshops (Goal B)

III. Recognize the audience.

Legislators and Board members may not be familiar with practices and terminology that are often taken for granted by the higher education community.

- Explain acronyms
- Avoid jargon
- Provide a brief background on standardized exams and/or surveys

IV. Follow the format to the letter.

- A. When a large number of pages is being reviewed (37 performance agreements X 3 goals (minimum) = 101 goals, minimum), the reader’s task is greatly facilitated by a common format. Even minor deviations from the format can interfere with the reader’s “cognitive processing” of the performance agreement.
- B. Use the form on the web page. Type your performance agreement into this form.
- C. Study the examples on the web page.