United States Department of Agriculture

Accountability System Plan
(A Companion to the USDA Human Capital Plan)

(FY 2003–07)

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1.0 USDA HUMAN CAPITAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Introduction

The Accountability System Plan ("The Plan") was developed as a companion document to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Human Capital (HC) Plan to ensure that HC planning is guided by a data-driven, results-oriented process. This Plan was based in large part on the USDA's HC Plan for FY2003–07 and rests on the HC Plan framework of policies and practices designed to guide USDA efforts in meeting its changing workforce needs. The Accountability System planning process was informed by the HC planning process, the USDA Strategic Plan (FY2002–07), the USDA Annual Performance Plans, the USDA Restructuring Plan (FY2003–07), and the preliminary USDA Skills Gap Analysis (September 2002).

The Plan contains the HC improvement goals and performance measures that will guide USDA in how it assesses, plans for, and responds proactively to its current and future HC challenges and needs. The improvement goals are supported by action strategies, timelines, and key performance measures that will help USDA determine progress and results. Many of the improvement goals and performance measures can be incorporated into the Departmental and agency strategic and annual performance plans (required by the Government Performance Results Act [GPRA] of 1993).

Executive Order 13197 requires that each agency, as part of its HC planning, "establish and maintain a system of accountability for merit system principles that (1) sets standards for applying the merit system principles, (2) measures the agency's effectiveness in meeting these standards, and (3) corrects any deficiencies in meeting these standards." USDA's Human Capital Accountability Team (HCAT), a collaborative team of human resource professionals from the Department and mission areas and agencies, as well as President's Management Agenda (PMA) leaders, developed a comprehensive system to ensure accountability in HC planning. The Plan follows Office of Personnel Management (OPM) guidance, outlines standards for performance, describes roles and responsibilities, and provides assessment tools for mission areas and agencies. The Plan describes the methodology for periodically reassessing the Accountability System to make sure it is purposeful. These steps will ensure that over time, people and resources are managed efficiently and effectively and in accordance with the merit system principles, Veteran's Preference Act, and related public policies to support the Department's shared vision.

The Plan is a living document that will be reviewed by the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) and the HCAT annually to ensure its effectiveness in measuring progress toward HC goals and action strategies. The HCAT, the Human Resources Leadership Council (HRLC), and collaborative HC forums will provide avenues in which to share best practices and determine what specific resources will be most useful for those with accountability roles and responsibilities. It is also important to consider the impact of the four other PMA initiatives: competitive sourcing, financial management, expanding electronic government, and budget and performance integration on the implementation of the Accountability System. As USDA "pilot tests" its new Accountability System, it may modify existing reporting tools or develop new ones, which will help to capture data for tracking the PMA initiatives integration.

In summary, the Plan is: a single source for HC performance standards, reporting requirements, and the monitoring and evaluation process; a mechanism to respond to internal and external stakeholders regarding progress towards meeting HC goals; and a vehicle to provide standardized accountability models and tools for the mission areas/agencies.

2.0 OVERVIEW OF USDA ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

2.1 Institutionalizing Accountability

Institutionalizing accountability at USDA involves a change in the way it assesses and evaluates the effectiveness and efficiency of the Human Resource Management (HRM) function and its activities. Historically, USDA has not specifically designated staff to oversee accountability processes and programs. Although a small unit in OHRM conducted Program Management Evaluations (PME) in conjunction with agency staff until the unit was disbanded in 1990, the unit's responsibilities were not focused solely on PMEs. Several of USDA's agencies have a long history of conducting human resources management evaluations on a regularly occurring cycle, and others have primarily partnered with OPM to conduct joint reviews. Recent Department-level evaluations have focused on specific issue areas rather than being a comprehensive look at HC. Some agencies have conducted legal compliance reviews of selected HRM functions; however, specific Departmental guidance for evaluating and assessing HRM program effectiveness may not have been implemented.

In 1996–1997, and again in 2001, OPM conducted a targeted PME within USDA. The PME in 2001 was conducted using the merit system principles as a basis for assessing HRM in the Department. OPM's June 2001 report of an oversight review recommended that USDA "develop and maintain a HRM accountability system that adheres to the merit system principles and sets standards for applying the principles, measures the agency's effectiveness in meeting those standards, and corrects any deficiencies."

In light of the 2001 PME review, emphasis on the PMA and the Government Accounting Office's (GAO) Risk Management Series, USDA has committed resources to meet the HC Accountability System goal to ensure USDA human resources programs are strategically aligned, effective, efficient, and in compliance with applicable laws and regulations (e.g., Veteran's Preference Act, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), merit system principles) using a Departmentwide Accountability System.

The Department has also committed to facilitate the development of a standardized USDA HRM Accountability Program based on the OPM's Human Capital Assessment and Accountability Framework (HCAAF) that—

- Uses an agency team to define accountability and develop short- and long-term plans

- Ensures a consistent approach

- Provides user-friendly, cost-effective tools for agencies

- Institutionalizes a results-oriented, data-driven system with key indicators/standards

- Identifies information to measure and creates a checklist for agencies

- Includes an annual assessment of effectiveness

- Assesses Department and agency HC progress using a results-oriented reporting system that is part of the USDA HRM Accountability Program.

2.2 USDA Accountability Plan Development Approach

USDA's Accountability System Plan is the product of the USDA HCAT - the same team that was instrumental in defining USDA's HC imperatives and the resulting HC Plan for the Department. Using the HC Plan and OPM's HCAAF, the HCAT developed performance standards for USDA's nine HC goals. These performance standards drive the accountability process toward results.

The HCAT identified several key characteristics for USDA's Accountability System Plan. These include:

- Tasking OHRM to continue playing a leadership role in accountability planning, monitoring, and evaluation

- Developing standardized guidance and facilitating the development of performance measurement tools for agencies. For example, tasking a working group to develop a recruitment satisfaction survey or to develop a new Web-based exit interview program

- Facilitating forums for sharing internal best practices and opportunities for improvement to support achievement of HC goals

- Coordinating agency representatives to provide performance measurement support. For example, coordinating documentation and monitoring of activities related to HC Plan implementation

- Recognizing the operational diversity of a department the size of USDA and the scope of its various programs, USDA's approach is to provide an accountability "framework" that establishes broad guidance and policies. This framework allows each mission area and agency flexibility to tailor processes, and thus ensures an HC program that adds value to the specific mission of each mission area and agency.

As mentioned previously, the Plan is a living document that will be updated annually. The updating/recalibrating process will be synchronized with the annual updates to the HC Plan to ensure alignment with the Department's evolving Strategic Plan, PMA initiatives' progress, and other changes involving workforce planning and restructuring.

3.0 HUMAN CAPITAL PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

This section outlines the key performance standards (measures) related to USDA's nine HC goals, as described in the HC Plan. The performance standards that are considered to be mission-critical (i.e., that are directly related to pervasive HC challenges), are so noted with "[mission-critical]." For each of the nine HC goals, the data source(s), reporting requirements, parties identified as accountable for ensuring progress, risks or challenges, and mitigation strategies are specified.

3.1 Strategic Alignment and Human Capital Planning

Goal #1: Strategic Alignment and Human Capital Planning -Institute a practice of systematic human capital management that is aligned with the USDA and agency and agency strategic plans, and integrated with budgets.	
Measure 1a) 100 percent of UDSA Departmental Administration and mission areas/agencies have developed HC strategies that are integrated into Strategic Plans or Annual Performance Plans by FY2004 [mission-critical]	
Data Source	HCAAF Self-Assessment Tool (annually); USDA HC Scorecard (quarterly "pulse check"); USDA HC Quarterly Accountability Report (QAR) (quarterly "pulse check")
Reporting Requirement	Annual summary; quarterly "pulse check"
Who is Accountable	OHRM and Mission Area Personnel Officers (MAPOs) *[Note: OHRM will report to OPM/OMB]*
Risks & Challenges	USDA cultural change issues around accountability and data reporting
Mitigation Strategies	Provide strategic communications, change management interventions, "pulse checks" as a way of providing assurance of progress toward goals

3.2 Workforce Planning and Deployment

Goal #2: Workforce Planning and Deployment -Institute a Departmentwide practice of conducting workforce planning that enables the Department and our agencies to efficiently and effectively deploy the workforce, as well as prevent skills gaps.	
Measure 2a) 100 percent of USDA agencies have developed a workforce plan, including reviewing their structure, which has been reviewed by OHRM no later than FY2004	
Data Source	HCAAF Self-Assessment Tool (annually); USDA HC Scorecard (quarterly "pulse check"), USDA HC QAR (quarterly "pulse check")
Reporting Requirement	Annual summary; quarterly "pulse check"
Who is Accountable	OHRM and MAPOs
Risks & Challenges	New census figures from Central Personnel Data File (CPDF) may mean inconsistent data for trending purposes; entire model not available for workforce planning but template is ready
Mitigation Strategies	OHRM has developed a Departmentwide model for workforce planning, which will make the process more efficient

3.3 Accountability System

Goal #3: Accountability System -Ensure that USDA human resources programs are strategically aligned, efficient, and in compliance with applicable laws and regulations (e.g., Veteran's Preference, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), Merit System Principles) and the PMA using a Departmentwide accountability system.	
Measure 3a) *Percentage of USDA agencies showing progress on OPM's Human Capital Standards for Success*	
Data Source	HCAAF Self-Assessment Tool (annually); HC Scorecard and HC QAR (quarterly)
Reporting Requirement	Annually; quarterly "pulse check"
Who is Accountable	OHRM, HCAT, and MAPOs
Risks & Challenges	USDA cultural change issues; change management process
Mitigation Strategies	Provide strategic communications, change management interventions, and "pulse checks" as a way of providing assurance of progress toward goals

3.4 Talent Management

Goal #4: Talent Management -Align recruitment and retention strategies with workforce planning efforts to enhance the effectiveness of these efforts and close critical position and competency gaps.	
Measure 4a) *No USDA mission-critical occupations with significant skills gap (less than 15 percent) by FY2007 [mission-critical]*	
Data Source	LMI Workforce Planning Model (automated tool)
Reporting Requirement	Annually
Who is Accountable	OHRM, mission areas/agencies, and MAPOs
Risks & Challenges	Need for automated tools; need to review all occupations that have not been reviewed yet through skill gap analysis; need to incorporate agency-specific, mission-critical occupation skill gaps; change in USDA strategic direction
Mitigation Strategies	Conduct comprehensive workforce planning

3.5 Leadership Development and Succession Planning

Goal #5: Leadership Development and Succession Planning -Ensure leadership continuity and development through workforce planning and analysis, and optimal use of available tools and resources throughout the Department to better achieve mission requirements.	
Measure 5a) *Retention rate of employees in career GS-15 and SES positions [mission-critical]*	
Data Source	National Finance Center
Reporting Requirement	Annually
Who is Accountable	OHRM, agency, and MAPOs
Risks & Challenges	None identified
Mitigation Strategies	None identified
Measure 5b) *Ratio of employees (GS-14 and above) enrolled in or having completed a managerial development program or SES Candidate Development Program (SESCDP) versus SES career positions [mission-critical]*	
Data Source	National Finance Center
Reporting Requirement	Annually
Who is Accountable	OHRM, agency, and MAPOs
Risks & Challenges	Some data are manually tracked; need to define what constitutes a managerial development program
Mitigation Strategies	Develop an automated tracking system to make process more efficient

3.6 Knowledge Management and Employee Development

Goal #6: Knowledge Management and Employee Development -Ensure that the USDA captures and shares knowledge, and develops employee competence to better perform the Department's mission.	
Measure 6a) *Responses to Government-Wide Survey (GWS) Leadership and Knowledge Management survey questions #45 through #50 are at or above the 3.00 indicator level*	
Data Source	Web-based survey
Reporting Requirement	Annually
Who is Accountable	OHRM, mission areas/agencies, and MAPOs
Risks & Challenges	GWS data received once a year; ability to conduct quarterly "pulse checks" where similar data is available
Mitigation Strategies	Conduct a USDA survey using Survey Tracker tool with identified GWS questions
Measure 6b) *100 percent of USDA agencies with Knowledge Management Strategies in place by FY2007*	
Data Source	HCAAF Self-Assessment Tool
Reporting Requirement	Annually
Who is Accountable	OHRM, mission areas/agencies, and MAPOs
Risks & Challenges	Need for coordination with OCIO where integration is necessary, ensuring common definitions of knowledge management
Mitigation Strategies	Ongoing collaboration effort with OCIO; HC forum for identifying best practices

3.7 Performance Management

Goal #7: Performance Management -Ensure the performance appraisal system is aligned with Departmental/organization mission accomplishment and is linked to employee development and recognition programs, ultimately improving individual and organizational performance.	
Measure 7a) *Responses to GWS Performance Culture survey questions are at or above the 3.00 indicator level [mission critical]*	
Data Source	GWS Survey
Reporting Requirement	Annually
Who is Accountable	OHRM
Risks & Challenges	Baseline data not available until 2nd Qtr FY2003; development of action plans after results analysis
Mitigation Strategies	Conduct a USDA survey using SurveyTracker tool with similar or identical questions

3.8 Diversity Management, Equal Employment Opportunity, and Civil Rights

Goal #8: Diversity Management, Equal Employment Opportunity, and Civil Rights - Ensure a diverse workforce with the necessary skills to accomplish the USDA mission and strategic goals.	
Measure 8a) *90 percent of diversity goals met by FY2004*	
Data Source	National Finance Center
Reporting Requirement	Quarterly
Who is Accountable	OHRM
Risks & Challenges	Ensuring that top management receives information for making decisions and supporting diversity initiatives
Mitigation Strategies	Develop and implement strategic communications; unify common initiatives and programs; partner with Department programs
Measure 8b) *95 percent of USDA agencies with active diversity outreach strategies by FY2004*	
Data Source	National Finance Center
Reporting Requirement	Quarterly
Who is Accountable	OHRM
Risks & Challenges	Ensuring that top management receives information for making decisions and supporting initiatives; multiple duplicative programs
Mitigation Strategies	Develop and implement strategic communications; partner with Department programs
Measure 8c) *Percentage of Civil Rights employment complaints processed in less than 180 days by FY2007 [mission-critical]*	
Data Source	National Finance Center
Reporting Requirement	Quarterly
Who is Accountable	OHRM
Risks & Challenges	Ensuring that top management receives information for making decisions; overcoming notable management challenge area
Mitigation Strategies	Develop and implement strategic communications; ensure all agencies engaged in common goal

3.9 Labor and Employee Relations and Conflict Management

Goal #9: Labor and Employee Relations and Conflict Management and successfully resolve employee disputes and maintain effective working relationships with labor organizations.	
Measure 9a) *Response to GWS Leadership survey question #25 is at or above 3.00 indicator level*	
Data Source	Employee Relations Tracking System (e.g., logs, database)
Reporting Requirement	Annually
Who is Accountable	OHRM
Risks & Challenges	GWS data received once a year; over-surveying the employees
Mitigation Strategies	Conduct a USDA survey using Survey Tracker tool with questions similar to GWS questions; Department coordination of surveys
Measure 9b) *Usage rate of workplace Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Program*	
Data Source	ADR Tracking System (e.g., logs, database)
Reporting Requirement	Quarterly
Who is Accountable	OHRM, MAPOs
Risks & Challenges	Need to develop automated system; ensuring intermittent progress for reporting
Mitigation Strategies	Allocate resources toward development of an automated system
Measure 9c) *Percentage of disputes resolved through USDA ADR Program*	
Data Source	ADR Tracking System (e.g., logs, database)
Reporting Requirement	Quarterly
Who is Accountable	OHRM, MAPOs
Risks & Challenges	Need to develop automated system; ensuring intermittent process for reporting
Mitigation Strategies	Allocate resources toward development of an automated system
Measure 9d) *Percentage of reduction in Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) charges per bargaining unit employee*	
Data Source	Labor Relations Tracking System
Reporting Requirement	Quarterly
Who is Accountable	OHRM, HCAT, MAPOs
Risks & Challenges	None identified
Mitigation Strategies	None identified

While the HC performance standards commit USDA mission areas/agencies to achieving corporate standards, they also drive the transformation in assessing, planning for, and responding to human capital challenges. USDA developed a process for regular monitoring and evaluation of Departmentwide success towards meeting these new performance standards.

4.0 IMPLEMENTING THE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

Implementation of the Plan requires the Department to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of those parties accountable for reporting progress against performance standards and assessing results. The Plan also identifies implementation risks and ensures that controls are in place to address problems and modify action strategies and other activities as appropriate or necessary.

4.1 USDA Accountability Process

Continuous monitoring and annual evaluation of the HC Plan implementation efforts are an important and essential component of the USDA's Accountability System Plan. Without adequate monitoring and evaluation, it would be difficult to determine if the HC strategies and programs are working effectively and having the desired impact (e.g., helping to ensure that the right people, with the right skills, are in the right place at the right time to achieve USDA's mission). Furthermore, monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Plan helps keep informed the Department's human capital policies, agency sponsors, and other internal and external stakeholders. USDA's process and time frame for monitoring and conducting an annual formal HR program evaluation are described below.

4.1.1 Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation

Ongoing monitoring of the implementation helps to ensure that problems are identified early and addressed or dealt with on a timely basis. The HCAT has identified the parties responsible for monitoring performance to identify progress being made toward goal achievement. It has also established mechanisms (e.g., HC forums) to document best practices in HC implementation being used throughout the Department, identify factors that inhibit or hinder meeting performance standards, and provide a feedback mechanism to the mission areas and agencies to enact process improvements. Key questions for consideration during the ongoing monitoring process include—
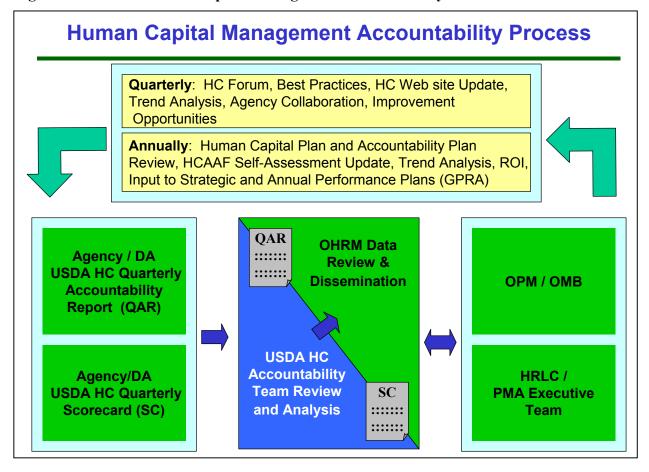
- How are HC strategies being implemented across the Department?

- What is leadership commitment during the implementation process? What level of resources (e.g., funding, full-time equivalents [FTE]) are agencies/USDA allocating for achieving HC goals?

- What HC Plan strategies are effective/ineffective in improving the overall quality of the USDA workforce? What are the expected/unexpected effects on the workforce?

- What action steps are the agencies/USDA taking to improve the strategies and processes to effect better HC results?

- How are ongoing stakeholder concerns addressed by the agencies/USDA with regard to HC Plan implementation?

- How are the agencies/USDA progressing toward desired targets and goals? What is the return on investment (ROI) in HC programs?

Figure 4-1 displays a high-level USDA HC accountability process within and outside the Department, along with the accountable parties, (e.g., mission areas/agencies [MAPOs], OHRM/HCAT, and the HRLC), their key roles and responsibilities, and reporting forms.

Figure 4-1. USDA Human Capital Management Accountability Process

Human Capital Management Accountability Process

Quarterly: HC Forum, Best Practices, HC Web site Update, Trend Analysis, Agency Collaboration, Improvement Opportunities

Annually: Human Capital Plan and Accountability Plan Review, HCAAF Self-Assessment Update, Trend Analysis, ROI, Input to Strategic and Annual Performance Plans (GPRA)

Agency / DA USDA HC Quarterly Accountability Report (QAR)

Agency/DA USDA HC Quarterly Scorecard (SC)

QAR

OHRM Data Review & Dissemination

USDA HC Accountability Team Review and Analysis

SC

OPM / OMB

HRLC / PMA Executive Team

4.1.1.1 Reporting Forms

A key component of the Plan is providing report forms for capturing data, tracking progress with initiatives, and evaluating HC Plan implementation and progress. The HCAT has developed three report forms for the agencies/USDA: HC Agency Scorecard (see Appendix A), the USDA HC Quarterly Accountability Report (QAR) (see Appendix B), and the HCAAF Self-Assessment (see Appendix C). Together, these forms and reports provide a comprehensive picture of quarterly HC progress at the agency and at the Department levels. The scorecard largely provides quantitative measures against performance standards, while the QAR provides a qualitative picture of progress toward HC action strategies and any agency/USDA-specific initiatives supporting the HC Standards of Success. The MAPOs use the HCAAF Self-Assessment annually to check overall HC management progress against the HC Standards for Success and the areas of focus for USDA, as noted by the HC action strategies. Table 4-1 summarizes the accountability reporting forms.

Table 4-1. Accountability Reporting Forms

Accountability Report Form	Purpose	Timetable
USDA HC Scorecard	▪ Assess Departmentwide performance against critical HC measures ▪ Provide specific performance measures for annual performance plans (required by GPRA)	Quarterly
USDA HC QAR	▪ Assess Departmentwide progress implementing HC action strategies	Quarterly
HCAAF Self-Assessment	▪ Assess Departmentwide performance against OPM's HC Standards for Success	Annually

OHRM and the HCAT will use the agency level information submitted to create a Departmentwide quarterly summary report and "rolled-up" scorecard for OPM and internal stakeholders to review. Development of Department level HC Scorecard and QAR are currently in progress. OHRM and HCAT will use the information submitted to trend data, monitor progress, and inform the meeting agendas of the HRLC and HC collaborative forums.

4.1.1.2 Roles and Responsibilities

Effective implementation of USDA's Accountability System Plan requires commitment of the subcabinet executives, agency executives and management, headquarters OHRM, and mission area and agency human resources offices. Senior leadership needs to communicate its commitment to the Departmentwide Accountability System and the expected results. In addition, they demonstrate support by ensuring sufficient resources are allocated to achieving the expected results. OHRM and HCAT will lead the necessary revisions or updates to the Accountability System Plan, facilitate coordination and collaboration among mission areas and agencies, and develop and implement reporting mechanisms and other tools as appropriate. Mission area and agency human resources offices are responsible for implementing HC action strategies, executing reporting processes, and participating in collaborative forums to share information and best practices. Additional roles and responsibilities are described below.

- **Mission Areas/Agencies (MAPOs)**

  Quarterly: On a quarterly basis, each MAPO will be responsible for assessing progress against the HC performance measures as outlined on the USDA HC Scorecard. Each MAPO will also provide a status update on HC activities as listed on the USDA HC QAR. Any issues or challenges to making progress against the performance measures or the milestones for the HC activities should be noted. OHRM will provide these data tracking and reporting tools, which will be available for download on the USDA HC intranet site.

  Annually: On an annual basis, the MAPOs will conduct an assessment of HC progress using the HCAAF Self-Assessment Tool. The expectation is that mission areas and agencies should be making progress in mission-critical HC performance areas and tracking their HC investments. OHRM will provide this data tracking and reporting form, which will be available for download on the USDA HC intranet site.

- **OHRM/HCAT**

  Quarterly: The OHRM-led HCAT, whose members include representatives from OHRM and mission areas and agencies, will serve multiple roles. First, HCAT will be responsible for monitoring, analyzing, and evaluating progress and results on the nine USDA HC goals. HCAT will trend Departmentwide progress against the HC performance measures based on the data received from the USDA HC Scorecard. HCAT will also track results against the HC action strategies by reviewing the information received from the USDA QAR. HCAT will also provide recommendations to OHRM on additional tools and technology improvements to support HC data gathering and analysis. Based on the information gathered, HCAT will produce a quarterly Departmentwide progress report for OHRM. This report will provide the data to update OPM quarterly on progress against the HC Plan. The MAPOs and PMA Executive Team will also receive copies of the report. The MAPOs will use the report as a discussion document on HC progress during their HRLC regular meetings.

  The PMA Executive Team will use the report to make decisions on HC resource priorities. This progress report will be posted on the HC intranet site and updated quarterly to produce the next quarterly report. To help ensure Departmentwide progress in critical HC areas, OHRM will host quarterly operational forums for promoting collaboration and sharing of HC information, resources, and best practices. Successes and challenges regarding human resource processes and programs will be discussed. MAPOs, agency representatives, and OHRM representatives will be invited to participate in these forums. Data for communication and collaboration with OPM regarding HC Plan progress and results will be provided by OHRM.

  Annually: HCAT will conduct an annual review of the HC Plan and Accountability System Plan, using the information reported through the HCAAF Self-Assessment Tool and mission area and agency ROI data. HCAT and OHRM will review the HC Plan annually and modify HC Plan action strategies, timelines, and performance measures as

necessary. HCAT and OHRM will also review and update, if necessary, the Plan annually.

- **HRLC**

   Monthly: This decision-making body will hold monthly meetings in which HC management issues are discussed. The group will plan to focus on a different area of the HC Standards for Success at each meeting.

   Quarterly: On a quarterly basis, the HRLC will designate time on the agenda for dialoguing on Departmentwide progress on the USDA HC Scorecard and the USDA HC QAR. This information will be shared with the agency leaders via the MAPOs.

- **PMA Executive Team**

   Quarterly: The PMA Executive Team will ensure regular communication to the subcabinet executives and secretary regarding Departmentwide progress on the USDA HC Scorecard and USDA HC QAR

   Annually: The PMA Executive Team will make decisions on HC resource priorities and investments.

- **Office of Budget and Program Analysis (OBPA)**

   Quarterly: OBPA will work with OHRM to ensure PMA coordination with all HC efforts.

   Annually: OBPA will work with OHRM to ensure PMA coordination regarding annual review and updating of the HC Plan.

- **OPM/Office of Management and Budget (OMB)**

   Quarterly: OPM and OMB will be responsible for evaluating USDA's Departmentwide quarterly reporting on HC initiatives.

Table 4-2 summarizes the roles and responsibilities described above.

Table 4-2. Accountability Roles and Responsibilities

Who is Accountable	Quarterly	Annually
Mission Areas/MAPOs	• Complete USDA HC Scorecard • Complete USDA QAR • Participate in HC forums • Communicate with agency leaders	• Complete HCAAF Self-Assessment Tool
OHRM/HCAT	• Monitor, analyze, and evaluate performance on HC goals using HC Scorecard and HC QAR • Produce Departmentwide HC progress report for OPM/OMB and other stakeholders • Update HC Web site • Host and participate in HC forums • Recommend tools and technology • Provide guidance and support • Ensure PMA coordination with all ongoing HC efforts	• Review and update HC Plan and Accountability System Plan • Ensure PMA coordination with all ongoing HC efforts
HRLC	• Discuss Departmentwide progress on HC Scorecard and HC QAR • Dialogue on HC Standards for Success at scheduled meetings	• Assess necessary future HC investments and budgets
PMA Executive Team	• Communicate with subcabinet executives and secretary regarding HC progress	• Make decisions on HC resource priorities
OBPA	• Monitor to ensure PMA coordination with all ongoing HC efforts	• Monitor to ensure PMA coordination regarding annual review and updating of HC Plan
OPM/OMB	• Evaluate USDA's Departmentwide quarterly reporting on HC initiatives	• Review data to derive Executive Branch Management Scorecard for HC management

4.1.2 Annual Evaluation

In addition to ongoing monitoring, USDA will conduct an annual evaluation or review of the HC Plan and Accountability System Plan. The objective of the annual evaluation is to assess the success of USDA in executing the action strategies outlined in the HC Plan relative to OPM's HC Standards of Success and the USDA's performance measures. Annual evaluations help determine how well the Department is achieving its outcomes, the efficiency and effectiveness of its HC programs, and compliance of its programs with merit system principles. Based on this annual assessment, OHRM and senior leadership will act to make broad-based improvements to the strategies and processes to achieve better HC results. Annual evaluation results may suggest the need for modifications to the HC Plan action strategies or Accountability System, including process improvements in implementing the strategies, adjusting timelines for achieving the

goals, recalibrating performance measures, or refining data collection approach and tools. Effective analysis will also provide input to forecast HC investments, programs, and budgets.

Key questions for consideration during the annual evaluation include—

- What significant HC improvements were noted as a result of HC planning?

- How effective or successful has the Department been in communicating its HC Plan to all agencies/USDA?

- How effective or successful has the Department been in implementing its HC strategies according to the HC Plan?

- How effective has the Department been in monitoring the outcomes of the HC Plan and strategies?

- How does the Department ensure that it has efficient and cost-effective processes for measuring progress or achievement of HC stragegic goals?

- What is the Department's standing in HC planning relative to stakeholder (e.g., PMA, OPM, OMB, GAO) requirements?

Figure 4-2 displays USDA's general approach to conducting the HC annual evaluation.

Figure 4-2. Process for Annual Evaluation of Progress Toward HC Goals

Before conducting the annual evaluation, the USDA will obtain a baseline of performance on each of the nine HC goals. Annual evaluations will assess progress toward goals or change in HC

performance against this baseline. Annual evaluations will identify opportunities for improvement across the Department as well as best practices in implementing HC action strategies across the agencies and USDA. Findings and recommendations from the annual evaluations will be fed back via multiple forums (e.g., HRLC, HC forums, HC Web site) to the key stakeholders to effect changes and HC performance improvement. The data collected and synthesized during quarterly ongoing monitoring activities will provide the basis for the annual evaluations. In addition, records or history logs (e.g., meeting minutes from HRLC and HC forums; discussion threads on HC Web site) may provide additional input during the annual evaluation phase. Information needs may be supplemented via interviews with key stakeholders.

Documentation of annual evaluation results and findings may be used by OHRM and the HCAT to conduct multiyear trend analysis over a period of performance (e.g., FY2003–07 HC Plan). Multiyear trend analysis shows progress toward achievement of HC goals over time. Qualitative analysis also reveals the chronic roadblocks to implementation, performance measurement, and achievement of HC strategic goals.

In addition to the baseline, annual evaluation, and multiyear trend analysis, to the extent possible, USDA may conduct benchmarking reviews of other similar public sector organizations (i.e., external "comparison group") and compare USDA performance with other Federal agencies to help identify best practices in performance measurement, learn how their practice seems to differ, and identify opportunities for improvement. Although the advantages of benchmarking are well known and accepted, care needs to be taken before drawing conclusions from comparative data. Conclusions can be misleading if the comparison groups are not "alike" in certain respects. A carefully selected comparison group or benchmarking organization can ensure that the benchmarks provide a good comparison.

At the end of the five years, USDA will also draft a summative report highlighting the key achievements against HC performance standards and develop recommendations for the Department's next five-year HC Plan. Annually, the progress and results of the HC Plan will be reflected in the USDA's Annual Performance Program Report (required by GPRA).

Critical Success Factors

To ensure successful implementation of the HC Plan and Accountability System Plan, a few critical success factors are identified:

- **Communication.** Inform various levels of management and employees about performance information

- **Commitment and Support.** Establish policies to institutionalize problem-solving approaches for failures or substandard performance toward goals

- **Recognize and Reward Achievement.** Provide recognition for achieving performance goals (e.g., acknowledgement in newsletters and other publications) and links to annual awards

APPENDIX A. USDA HUMAN CAPITAL (HC) AGENCY SCORECARD
(insert electronically attached Excel file: Appendix A – USDA Agency Scorecard)

APPENDIX B. HC QUARTERLY ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT (QAR)
(insert electronically attached Word file: Appendix B – Quarterly Accountability Report)

APPENDIX C. HCAAF SELF-ASSESSMENT

(insert electronically attached Excel file: Appendix C – USDA HCAAF Self-Assessment Tool)