

Fermilab Employee Advisory Group Meeting June 15, 2010 - meeting summary

In Attendance:

Christine Ader
Carol Angarola
Jamie Blowers
Sandra Charles
Julius Bouchert
Curtiss Danner
Ed Dijak
Terri Dykhuis
Denise Keiner
Aria Meyhoefer
Pier Oddone
Robert Plumer
Sue Quarto
Rhianna Wisniewski
Sam Zeller

Issue 1: Update on dual track issue

An overview of the dual track issue was provided. The purpose is to grade positions that have not yet been put into specific pay grades, or that fall under temporary management appointments. This will allow every job at the laboratory to have a formal job description and have its pay and salary administered by the same laboratory pay policy. This effort will also recognize that managerial skills have a value in and of themselves and provide pay recognition to people in these technical and management positions, tied to market value for these jobs. HR is in the process of writing descriptions and placing jobs in grades. Jobs are compared to organizations of similar size and complexity at other labs and technical industries. HR also purchases custom surveys for information.

The result will expand the exempt monthly pay structure from 11 to 15 grades. Management assignments up to three years will receive a salary stipend. Appointments in excess of three years, or where there is a clear market value, will be handled as a promotion. Salaries will be readjusted based on return to former positions. Criteria still need to be established to determine these grades and salary levels.

This program requires the concurrence of FRA board and DOE, and HR is currently awaiting these approvals. Once approved, the program will be implemented in two phases over next two fiscal years. Existing managerial jobs

are included in phase 1. Phase 2 will include engineering and scientific management positions which are yet to be fully identified.

EAG information request:

The EAG would like to see where all managers fall within the laboratory by division and program and how many reports each has.

EAG recommendations to management:

- Prepare a clear written description of this program and its impacts
- In communicating the results, present how it compares to other institutions, and what information and data were used
- People will want to know “does this apply to me?” Describe far down the lab this reach and who might be affected

Issue 2: Performance appraisal process

Juanita Frazier from HR provided an overview of the program. Performance management is a continuous process, a living document to be flexible and interactive throughout the year. If the employee is surprised by their rating, then managers have not done their jobs throughout the year. Most grievances occur at the commendable vs. excellent levels and not at the lower levels.

The current appraisal system links performance to pay and is geared toward reaching a conclusion based on your performance rating. It does give managers some flexibility in providing pay and balancing between groups. Issues occur when larger groups need to normalize how managers rate their employees so that there is fairness across the lab and there needs to be good communication and training of supervisors.

The average at Fermilab is very high performance and that is why we called it commendable. Any time you make a hard boundary there will be people on either side and some will not be happy about it. This system is not rigid and allows managers to not fit into such precise percentages. We do not force rank.

The EAG members discussed their role in improving the system. There are both issues of instrument and implementation, as well as a lot of judgment and intangibles that come into play. Questions were asked as to whether performance appraisal should be just one piece of how we reward people, and are we handicapped by the fair evaluation of performance because of the tie to pay? How else could people be rewarded? Does it all come down to pay or is recognition just as important?

Members asked what happens when HR sees inconsistencies or problems with appraisals. It was explained that HR will reach out to managers on legal issues

but does not otherwise take direct action. HR personnel explained that employees do have a grievance path they can pursue if they felt the process is unfair. Most members were not aware that such a grievance process existed. It was noted that there is a four week orientation that new employees are supposed to get from their hiring managers and that all of the information is on the web.

EAG member observations:

- Neither managers nor employees are sufficiently equipped or informed to conduct effective performance appraisals.
- People will always compare their appraisal to the rest of the group as opposed to the raw score
- A much better effort needs to be in place for how we measure against goals
- The issue of goal inflation and deflation is critical and based on individual employees and managers, not any lab-wide policy
- In the end, we are forced to fit a distribution because of the pay being tied to performance evaluation, and the limitations in overall pay increases available

EAG recommendations:

- The lab needs to do a better job of informing employees about how the system works and help them feel better about being "Fermilab average"
- HR needs to make sure that managers have tools to be effective, training should not be optional and refresher training should be offered every year
- There should also be employee-specific training so that employees know what to expect and how to get the most out of the system and to understand their rights

EAG next steps:

- The EAG will discuss further about instrument vs. implementation and continue to pursue opportunities to improving the performance evaluation process over the next year.