

Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)

SOP · US · Updated 2026-07-13 · Square brackets are placeholders to replace with your own details.

A performance improvement plan (PIP) is a written, time-limited plan for an employee whose performance has fallen short: it names the specific gaps with examples, sets measurable goals, lists the support the employer will provide, schedules check-ins, and states plainly what happens if performance does not improve. It is the structured alternative to letting a problem drift until termination is the only move left.

A PIP done right is two things at once: a genuine chance for the employee to succeed, and a documented record that the employer identified the problem, said so clearly, and helped. A PIP done as theater — vague goals, no support, a predetermined ending — is worse than none, because the document proves the process was hollow.

This template gives you the full procedure: when a PIP is the right tool, how to write goals someone else could score, the delivery meeting, the check-in rhythm, and the closing outcomes — with the at-will language that keeps the plan from being read as a promise of continued employment.

Purpose and scope

This procedure sets out how [Your company] writes, delivers, and manages performance improvement plans. It applies to all employees and to every manager who initiates a PIP; [HR/name/role] reviews every plan before delivery. A PIP does not alter the at-will nature of employment and creates no guarantee of continued employment during or after the plan.

When a PIP is — and is not — the right tool

- Use a PIP for sustained performance gaps against the job description and agreed goals: missed standards, quality problems, unmet targets — things effort and support can fix.
- Do not use a PIP for misconduct — policy violations, dishonesty, safety breaches go through the progressive discipline policy, which moves at a different speed.
- Before starting, check for explanations that change the path: a possible disability (open the ADA accommodation conversation), protected leave that explains the gap, or a recent complaint that would make the timing look retaliatory. Resolve those first, with [HR/counsel].
- Do not open a PIP you have already decided is theater. If the honest position is that continued employment is untenable, that is a different decision — a hollow PIP documents bad faith, not diligence.

Roles and responsibilities

- Manager: drafts the plan, delivers it, holds every check-in, and documents each one — the PIP lives or dies on the manager's follow-through.
- [HR/name/role]: reviews the draft for specificity, consistency with how comparable cases were handled, and retaliation or accommodation red flags before anything is delivered.
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Employee: engages with the goals, uses the support offered, and raises obstacles — including anything they believe the plan has got factually wrong — as they arise.

Writing the plan

1. State each performance gap specifically, with dated examples, measured against the job description and prior goals — "missed [standard] in [weeks/dates]" rather than "poor attitude".
2. Set [2–4] goals a stranger could score: measurable, within the employee's control, achievable within the plan period, and tied to the role's essential functions.
3. List the support [Your company] will provide — [training, coaching sessions, tools, adjusted workload during ramp-up] — with names and dates, because "support" without an owner is a word.
4. Set the plan period ([30/60/90 days] is typical — long enough that improvement is genuinely possible) and schedule check-ins every [week/two weeks] with dates in the document.
5. State the consequence plainly: failure to reach and sustain the goals may result in [reassignment, demotion, or termination of employment] — and include the at-will statement: this plan is not a contract and does not guarantee employment for the plan period or any period.
6. Send the draft to [HR/name/role] for review before delivery — specificity, consistency, and red flags — and revise until it would read as fair to an outsider.

The PIP meeting

1. Meet privately, with [HR/a second manager] present, and say what the meeting is at the start — the employee should not discover the PIP on page two.
2. Walk through each gap and its examples, then each goal, the support, the check-in dates, and the consequences — plain words, no euphemisms that soften the record into ambiguity.
3. Invite the employee's response and listen: correct any facts the plan got wrong before finalizing it, and note disagreements that remain — absorbing their evidence now is what makes the plan credible later.
4. Have the employee sign to acknowledge receipt — noting that signature is not agreement — and record any refusal with a witness; give them a copy and file the original at [system/location].

Check-ins and documentation

- Hold every scheduled check-in — a missed check-in is the employer failing the plan, and the record will show it.
- Score each goal at each check-in, in writing, the same day: on track, behind, or met, with the evidence. Share the note with the employee.
- Deliver the promised support on the promised dates, and document that too — the support line is the first thing a hollow PIP is caught on.
- Adjust the how, not the bar: obstacles the employee raises can change support or method, but goals only change through [HR/name/role], in writing.
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No surprises at the end: if the final outcome would surprise the employee, the check-ins were not honest enough.

Closing the plan

- Goals met: close the plan in writing, congratulate the employee, and say plainly that the standard now has to be sustained — continued employment remains at will, and a relapse reopens the process at [stage].
- Partial progress: [extend once by [period] with revised dates / proceed to outcome] — decided with [HR/name/role] and documented either way.
- Goals not met: the outcome — [reassignment, demotion, or termination] — is decided by [name/role] with [HR/counsel], following the [termination/offboarding procedure], with the PIP file as the record.
- Any closing outcome is confirmed to the employee in writing and filed with the plan, the check-in notes, and the acknowledgments at [system/location].

Records and review

The plan, check-in notes, support records, and closing letter are kept in the personnel file at [system/location] for [period], with access per [policy] and any state personnel-file law that applies. [HR/name/role] reviews PIP usage [frequency] for consistency across teams and protected groups — the pattern of who gets a PIP and who gets fired without one is itself evidence.

This procedure is reviewed [frequency, e.g. annually] and after any dispute arising from a plan. Owner: [name/role]. Next review due: [date].

How to use this template

1. Write the goals first and test them on someone outside the situation: if they cannot say exactly what "met" looks like, rewrite until they can.
2. Put the check-in dates in both calendars before the delivery meeting — the schedule is a commitment, not an intention.
3. Keep the consequence sentence and the at-will statement intact; softening them creates the ambiguity the plan exists to remove.
4. Run the draft past [HR/counsel] for retaliation timing and accommodation questions before delivery, not after a challenge.
5. Document every check-in the day it happens — a PIP with a signed plan and no check-in notes reads as a decision looking for a paper trail.

Official guidance

- › [EEOC — Employers](#)
- › [EEOC — Disability discrimination](#)
- › [EEOC — Retaliation](#)

This template is provided in good faith and for general information — it is not legal advice. Adapt it to your organisation and, where your sector carries specific legal requirements, have the finished document reviewed by a qualified adviser. The live version at <https://trainedteam.com/templates/performance-improvement-plan-template> is kept current; this file is a snapshot.