

Understanding Stakeholder Comments

Performance Excellence Job Aid for Staff (Reviewees) and Stakeholders

The new Stakeholder Comments feature enriches Northwestern's Performance Excellence (PEX) process by creating the opportunity for staff to gather input from multiple perspectives. While not a required part of the process, including feedback from peers, colleagues, and/or other university community members can support employee growth, self-awareness, and professional development.

How the Process Works

The Stakeholder Comments process is initiated by the staff member (Reviewee) within myHR Learn during the designated Performance Excellence review period. To request input, the Reviewee selects individuals from their network who are best positioned to speak to their work behaviors and contributions. Once selected, stakeholders will receive an email notification with a link to submit their comments directly in myHR Learn. All comments must be submitted by the close of the review period to be included in the final review.

How Many Stakeholders to Select

Northwestern recommends inviting between three and five stakeholders. This range provides a meaningful variety of perspectives without creating an undue burden on colleagues. Reviewees should prioritize quality over quantity — selecting individuals who have consistent, direct experience with their work rather than those with limited or infrequent interaction.

Confidentiality

During the active review period, submitted comments are not visible to the Reviewee or their manager. However, once the Performance Excellence process is complete, all Stakeholder Comments and the names of contributing stakeholders will be visible to both the Manager and the Reviewee. Stakeholders should keep this in mind when composing their feedback and write comments they would be comfortable sharing directly with the staff member.

Manager's Role in the Process

First, stakeholders should be identified and agreed upon by both the Reviewee and the Manager. If both parties cannot agree, that specific Stakeholder should not be included in the process. Beyond that, Managers are encouraged to remind staff members that the Stakeholder Comments feature is available and to support their participation in the process. Once the review period closes, Managers will have access to all submitted comments and stakeholder names as part of the completed Performance Excellence record.

After Comments Are Submitted

Once the review period closes, the Manager will review all Stakeholder Comments as part of their overall assessment. Managers are encouraged to share relevant themes and insights with the Reviewee during the performance review conversation, framing them in the context of professional development. Stakeholder Comments do not generate a separate rating — they are intended to inform and enrich the manager's feedback, not replace it.

Opting Out

Participation in the Stakeholder Comments process is entirely voluntary for both Reviewees and Stakeholders. Reviewees may choose not to solicit stakeholder input without any impact on their performance review. Likewise, individuals who are asked to serve as a stakeholder may decline at their discretion. If a stakeholder does not respond before the close of the review period, their comments will simply not be included — there is no penalty for the Reviewee or the stakeholder.

How Stakeholder Comments Benefits Employees

- **Increases self-awareness** by highlighting strengths and blind spots that may not appear otherwise.
- **Encourages growth and development** by identifying skills and behaviors on which staff members can intentionally improve.
- **Builds trust and collaboration** by reinforcing open, constructive feedback as part of the Performance Excellence process.
- **Expands Performance Excellence into a multisource feedback process** that can include input from the staff members, peers, and their direct reports (where applicable), in addition to their manager.
- **Focuses on behaviors and competencies**, such as collaboration, communication, leadership, and accountability.
- **Supports professional development** by helping staff members understand how their actions are experienced by others across the organization.

What Stakeholder Comments Cannot Do

- **Not a forum for anonymous complaints, personal conflicts, or unverified issues.** Once the Performance Excellence process is complete, all Stakeholder Comments and the Stakeholder's name will be visible to the Manager and the Reviewee. [Anonymous complaints or feedback should be routed to other channels.](#)
- **Not a replacement for manager feedback.** Managers' review and rating still have the most vital impact. Stakeholder Comments should be one of many factors in a staff members' review, not the only factor or even the most important.

Who Counts as a Stakeholder?

In order to contribute Stakeholder Comments, the person must be able to access myHR Learn using their NU email credentials. Here are some general examples of potential Stakeholders:

- **Peer teammates** – Colleagues who work closely with the Reviewee on shared projects or day-to-day tasks.
- **Cross-functional partners** – Individuals from other schools, units, or departments who regularly collaborate with the Reviewee (e.g., HR, Finance, IT, Operations).
- **Customers or stakeholders** – Faculty or Staff who rely on the Reviewee's work, services, or expertise. Please note: HR recommends undergraduate students not be considered as Stakeholders.
- **Project leads or coordinators** – Individuals who have overseen the Reviewee's work on specific initiatives or assignments.
- **Direct reports (if applicable)** – Team members who can speak to the Reviewee's key skills, such as communication, collaboration, and leadership behaviors.
- **Mentors or advisors** – Trusted colleagues familiar with the Reviewee's work style and professional strengths.
- **Frequent collaborators outside the immediate role** – Partners who interact often but are not part of the core team.

What Should Stakeholders Focus On?

- **Base feedback on your direct working experience:** Share observations from interactions you've personally had with the staff member in meetings, projects, or day-to-day collaboration.
- **Focus on observable, job-related behaviors:** Describe what the staff member did or said and how it affected your work, without making assumptions about intent or personality. [NU's values and behaviors](#) could be a helpful resource.
- **Highlight strengths as well as growth opportunities:** Specify behaviors that positively support the team, alongside areas where small changes could increase effectiveness.
- **Provide specific, constructive examples:** When possible, include brief examples to help make your feedback clear and actionable.
- **Look for consistent patterns over time:** Offer feedback based on behaviors you've noticed repeatedly, not isolated incidents or onetime situations.
- **Keep feedback respectful and professional:** Write your comments as if you were sharing them directly with the staff member in a productive conversation.
- **Frame suggestions to support development:** Focus on how the staff member can continue growing, collaborating, and contributing successfully.
- **Keep feedback concise and relevant:** Share insights that are meaningful and helpful without overexplaining or adding unnecessary detail.