

We empower you to make the most of your public service career

What's Inside

This MyInfo Sheet will be of interest to excluded employees in the BC public service who receive a letter that expresses concerns about job performance or one that is presented as a "Letter of Expectation".

Some of the ideas presented in this MyInfo sheet include:

- What is a letter of expectation
- How to respond
- How the BCEEa can help.

Letters of Expectation

As a government employee, you are likely accustomed to receiving lots of written communications, most of which relate to operational matters to which you can skillfully respond. A letter that is directed to you personally and is about your job performance, however, will likely cause you stress and anxiety. It may catch you off guard and completely throw you for a loop. The letter may either be about shortcomings in your job performance or may set out how management expects you to perform your job duties.

These letters are generally characterized as a "Letter of Expectation" or a "Letter of Discipline". These letters are placed on your personnel file and will form part of your permanent record.

WHAT IS A LETTER OF EXPECTATION?

In the public service, there are generally two types of "Letter of Expectation". The first is a general or 'generic' Letter of Expectation that is issued to all staff within a work unit and sets out general standards. These standards can cover a variety of topics, such as procedures for absences, how to make requests for leave, positive interpersonal communications, work practices, etc. The second type of letter is 'personalized' and given to you only, that addresses either several topics or is narrow in its focus.

A Letter of Expectation should not refer to previous infractions or concerns and should not have a negative tone. At the most basic level, the letter simply outlines desired objectives about work responsibilities or work behaviour. The letter is commonly utilized to reinforce job requirements. In some instances, the letter is the beginning or part of a corrective process about areas of job performance that require improvement. The letter may also serve as a prelude to potential disciplinary action if no change occurs in conduct or performance.



WHAT IS A LETTER OF DISCIPLINE?

A Letter of Discipline will make statements about shortcomings in job performance or will document a specific incident to which management has deemed unsatisfactory and/or unacceptable. Depending on the circumstances, there may be an offer of support, such as training or a mentor. The letter will require you to demonstrate improvement, or it will demand cessation of undesired behaviours. It will also include a warning that failure to improve performance or repeat instances of undesirable behaviour may lead to additional censures or termination of employment.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO NEXT?

Most people feel very uncomfortable hearing feedback about their performance. This is particularly true if the message is perceived to be negative, severe, or punitive.

What should you do if you receive a letter? Above all else, stay calm. Do not overreact or respond immediately, particularly if you are surprised, upset, or angry. Take a moment to carefully consider the following questions:

1. Did your manager meet with you to discuss the letter? What did the manager say? Did you take notes? If not, take time now to jot down everything the manager said while it is still fresh in your mind.
2. Was the issuance of the letter a surprise, or had your manager discussed the topics with you in the past? When? What did they say? Jot down dates and your recollection of what has occurred in the past.
3. Did the manager characterize the letter as disciplinary or expectation?
4. Were specific areas or behaviours discussed in the letter?
5. What inferences are you drawing from the letter?
6. In your view, is the letter accurate? Is the letter fair and factual? Has anything been misstated?
7. What do you believe to be the manager's intention in issuing this letter?
8. What are your concerns about receiving this letter?
9. What has the manager said about future meetings?
10. Are there areas where you think you could improve your performance?

How Can the BCEEa Help

After considering the above, call the BCEEa to discuss your situation with an Advisor. We will review the circumstances leading to the issuance of the letter and we will work with you to develop a plan. We will discuss the implications and the pros and cons of your options. We will also discuss the following points:



1. How we can help you assess your performance and make any shifts or changes that would help resolve concerns expressed by your supervisor.
2. Should you respond formally?
3. Should you ask for a meeting with your manager to discuss the letter further? What questions might you want to ask?
4. You may be aware that unionized employees have collective agreement provisions that enable the removal of disciplinary letters under specific criteria. This provision does not apply to excluded managers; however, it may be possible to negotiate for your circumstances. Is it appropriate in this scenario?
5. Should you ask for a retraction of the letter, or seek corrections or changes in the wording in the letter?
6. In rare instances, it advisable to consult with a lawyer?

If you receive a letter, give us a call so that we can advise you on what factors to consider and we can support you on next steps.

