

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

1. PURPOSE

This Directive establishes MRP policy for awarding and recognizing employees, groups, and others for their performance and acknowledging their contributions and achievements in support of MRP and USDA's mission and goals. Awards and recognition will be utilized to create an environment of inclusion, exceptional performance and effective leadership, and to eliminate barriers to service excellence.

2. REPLACEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

This Directive replaces:

- a. MRP Directive 4451.1, dated 9/23/11.
- b. APHIS program-specific awards and recognition policies that may already exist. APHIS programs may not develop any additional or amending policies, but may develop additional instructional guidance, if desired.
- c. GIPSA Directive 4451.1, dated 3/14/08.

3. AUTHORITIES/REFERENCES

This Directive must be applied in conjunction with:

- a. Title 5, United States Code (U.S.C.), Chapter 23 – Merit Systems Principles.
- b. 5 U.S.C. 4301(2) – Performance Appraisals – General Provisions.
- c. [5](#) U.S.C. Chapter 45 – Incentive Awards.
- d. 5 U.S.C. 5384 – Performance Awards in the Senior Executive Service (SES).
- e. Title 5, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 430 – Performance Management.
- f. 5 CFR 451 – Awards.
- g. 5 CFR 531, Subpart E – Quality Step Increases.
- h. 5 CFR 534.405 – Performance Awards.

- i. Departmental Regulation (DR) 4040-430, Performance Management.
- j. DR 4040-451-1, USDA Employee Awards and Recognition Program.

4. POLICY

- a. It is MRP policy to use employee awards and other forms of recognition to show appreciation for organizational, individual, and group performance that exceeds performance and/or public service expectations, especially that which contributes to the core values, mission, and goals of MRP and the Department. Actual awards and recognition will:
 - (1) Be commensurate with the purpose and intent of the award granted.
 - (2) Provide for special acknowledgment of accomplishment(s).
 - (3) Be awarded as close to the time of achievement as possible.
- b. Managers and supervisors will be held accountable for using awards and other forms of recognition to achieve or acknowledge excellence through the mandatory performance element(s) that include responsibility for performance management.
- c. The awards and recognition program will be administered consistent with the provisions of this Directive, the USDA policy stated in DR 4040-451-1, and the principles set forth in 5 U.S.C. 2301 – Merit System Principles.

5. JUSTIFICATION AND APPROVAL OF AWARDS

- a. All awards and recognition recommendations require separate, written justifications.
- b. All awards and recognition recommendations must be approved at a higher level than the Recommending Official, except for Time-off Awards of 10 hours or less.
- c. Human Resources will sign award forms, certifying that the action is in compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements.
- d. Delegations of authority for approving awards are contained in Attachment 1 of this Directive.

6. COVERAGE

This Directive is applicable to all MRP employees except:

- a. Members of the Senior Executive Service (SES) and senior-level (SL) and scientific and professional employees (ST).

- b. Foreign Service employees.
- c. Employees appointed by the President.
- d. Employees excluded from coverage by statute or by Office of Personnel Management (OPM) regulation, including those excluded by 5 U.S.C., Section 4301 (2).
- e. Schedule C employees as specified in DR 4040-430 and DR 4040-451-1.

Managers and employees in programs with recognized bargaining units are advised to refer to appropriate negotiated agreements to determine how this Directive is implemented for bargaining unit members.

7. **RESPONSIBILITIES**

a. Employees will:

- (1) Complete accomplishment reports which can be used to help document performance accomplishments, and which may be used to generate justifications for award recommendations.
- (2) Identify career goals and participate freely in performance discussions.
- (3) Notify timekeepers and provide appropriate documentation of approved Time-off Awards in order to update the employee's leave balance in the time and attendance system.

b. Supervisors will:

- (1) Monitor and evaluate employees based on work performance and completion of assignments.
- (2) Nominate/Approve employees for awards and recognition.
- (3) Determine if awards are cost effective and within the award limits established by the program
- (4) Track and monitor awards received by employees.
- (5) Request and consider award preferences from employees (e.g., time-off vs. monetary award; public vs. private recognition).

NOTE: If you are recognizing an employee not under your supervision, notify the immediate supervisor of the employee being recognized to ensure there are no concerns on behalf of the supervisor and to ensure the employee has not already been recognized for the same body of work.

- c. Approving Officials will:
 - (1) Determine the propriety of the request.
 - (2) Obtain concurrence/approvals within their Programs to ensure that awards do not exceed award limitations based on OPM and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) requirements to reduce award spending.
 - (3) Review request(s) for approval/disapproval.
- d. Agency Programs/Divisions will:
 - (1) Establish verification or oversight procedures to ensure that awards are given fairly and equitably and to verify that adequate documentation exists to support recognition.
 - (2) Establish Program Quality Control Coordinator(s) who will review requests and supporting documentation for completeness before submitting them to approving officials and/or Human Resources Division (HRD) (see Attachment 2 and Samples), and liaison with HRD on informal reviews/audits of the awards and recognition program.
 - (3) Keep records on the number of non-monetary awards issued, average cost, and type of item(s) purchased, and provide reports, as requested.
- e. HRD will:
 - (1) Receive and sign the AD-287-2, Recommendation and Approval of Awards, certifying that it meets policy requirements (signatures, justifications, etc.).
 - (2) Provide policy advice and guidance and serve as a liaison with the Department on the awards and recognition system; provide checklists and other tools for review activities; and liaison with programs on informal reviews/audits of the awards and recognition program.

8. TYPES OF AWARDS

- a. Performance Bonus Awards. These awards are intended to recognize sustained levels of successful performance over the course of the rating period. Employees who receive a rating of record of no less than *Fully Successful* are eligible for a performance-based award. Performance-based awards for covered employees usually may not exceed 10 percent of the employee's rate of basic pay. However, for exceptional accomplishments, performance-based awards not to exceed 20 percent of the employee's rate of basic pay may be granted.

- (1) Performance-based awards must be given within 90 days of the end of the performance appraisal cycle. An employee may be granted no more than one performance-based award for the same appraisal cycle.
- (2) The granting of a performance-based award is discretionary on the part of management, not an employee entitlement unless provided for in accordance with the terms of a collective bargaining agreement.
- (3) Employees who receive a performance rating of “Fully Successful” or above are eligible for discretionary performance awards after the end of the appraisal cycle. Performance Bonus Awards are given to individuals, not to groups.
- (4) Justification and Approval.
 - (a) The AD-287-2 (see Attachment 3) must be signed by the Recommending Individual and by the Approving Official.
 - (b) A performance bonus must be supported by a copy of the employee's current AD-435, Performance Appraisal, which must reflect a Fully Successful rating or higher and a written justification (see Attachment 8) stating the reasons for and examples of successful performance.
 - (c) The award amount recommended on the AD-287-2 is the gross amount of the award. Taxes will be withheld and the employee will receive the net amount.
 - (d) Performance Bonus Awards will be processed as soon as possible upon receipt in the HRD, Processing Section and in accordance with the time frames listed above.

For help in determining award amounts, refer to the recognition scales in [USDA Employee Awards and Recognition, DR 4040-451-001](#).

- b. Quality Step Increase (QSI). The purpose of a QSI is to provide recognition of sustained high-quality performance and faster-than-normal progression through the step rates of the General Schedule (GS)/General Manager (GM) pay system. Unlike other forms of recognition, QSIs permanently increase an employee's rate of basic pay.
 - (1) Eligibility.
 - (a) An employee must have received an “*Outstanding*” rating of record. QSIs are based on the grade level and duties in which performance was measured. A QSI is not required or

automatically granted for an “*Outstanding*” performance rating. A manager/supervisor reserves the discretion to grant a QSI.

- (b) QSIs may not be granted if the employee received a QSI within the preceding 52 consecutive calendar weeks.
- (c) An employee may not receive a QSI if he/she has received a performance award based in whole or in part on the performance rating of record for the same appraisal cycle.
- (d) A QSI does not change the effective date of the employee’s normal within-grade increase (WGI) except when the QSI places the employee in the fourth or seventh step. In this case, the employee would enter into a prescribed longer waiting period. When a WGI and QSI are effective on the same day, the WGI should be processed before the QSI to avoid situations where the QSI may place the employee in a longer waiting period. QSI’s may not be granted at the top step of the pay range.

(2) Justification and Approval.

- (a) The AD-287-2 (see Attachment 4) must be signed by the Recommending Individual and by the Approving Official. The Approving Official must be at a managerial level higher than the recommending individual and must be in compliance with the Award Delegations of Authority (see Attachment 1).
- (b) A QSI must be supported by a copy of the employee’s current AD-435, which must reflect an “*Outstanding*” rating, and a written justification stating the reasons for the QSI and examples of the “*Outstanding*” performance (see Attachment 8).
- (c) Normally, QSI recommendations will be acted upon within 30 days after the rating of record is approved. However, the effective date may be delayed if the QSI would place the employee in step 4 or 7 of his/her grade, and a delay would benefit the employee.

c. Extra Effort Awards. These awards recognize specific accomplishments that are in the public interest and have exceeded normal job requirements. The extra effort award is separate from recognition based on the employee's performance rating.

(1) Monetary Extra Effort Awards.

- (a) This type of award recognizes a particular accomplishment, such as a superior contribution on a short-term assignment or project, an act of heroism, a scientific achievement, major discovery, or

significant cost savings. Dollar amounts are determined by the value of benefit and application of the contribution to the Agency's mission or goals. Monetary recognition can be given in conjunction with nonmonetary recognition (e.g., a cash award given with a plaque).

- (b) This award recognizes individuals or groups who make significant one-time contributions (e.g., special project, task force, etc.) toward achieving the Agency's mission or goals.
- (c) Provide managers, supervisors and peers with a means of recognizing an employee for a "one-time" act or occurrence that is recognized as a contribution or accomplishment that is within or outside of an employee's job responsibilities. Examples of employee achievements that might be considered for an extra effort award include:
 - 1 Contributing to emergency response activities;
 - 2 Making a one-time contribution or accomplishment that is within or outside his/her job requirements; and/or
 - 3 Making a scientific achievement.
- (d) The guidelines for monetary extra effort awards take into account the positive impact of the effort being recognized. Per DR 4040-451-1, award amounts range from \$50 to more than \$10,000 and must be determined in accordance with the Measurable and/or Non-measurable Benefits Scales.

These awards may be for an individual or group contributions. Wherever possible, measurable benefits should be calculated to determine award amounts. The Approving Official must ensure that funds are available and within their budget allocations.

(2) Nonmonetary Extra Effort Awards.

- (a) A nonmonetary award may be granted to recognize contributions that do not meet the standard for a cash award or in cases where the contributions do meet the standard, but the supervisor chooses not to grant a monetary award. Examples of nonmonetary recognition include time-off, honorary, informal recognition, letters of appreciation or commendation, certificates of appreciation or commendation, and keepsakes (mementos and tokens).
- (b) Employees may receive nonmonetary awards as often as their contributions are considered worthy of recognition, except where

limitations are set by Departmental guidelines (e.g., no employee may be granted more than 80 hours time off during a leave year).

- (c) Nonmonetary awards will be nominal in value. The primary value of items should be as forms of recognition, not as objects with monetary value. The limit is \$250 on any one item, with the higher-end amounts reserved for high-level honorary awards or other major accomplishments. For more guidance on appropriate use of non-monetary items for recognition, refer to the [USDA Regulation on Employee Awards and Recognition Program](#).

(3) Eligibility.

- (a) MRP Employees. All MRP employees are eligible for Extra Effort Awards. SES career employees are eligible for performance bonuses, Presidential Rank, and Extra Effort Awards (excluding spot and time-off awards). SES non-career employees are eligible for Extra Effort Awards (excluding spot and time-off awards). Former employees are eligible for monetary and nonmonetary awards for recent contributions made while employed by the Agency.

- (b) Non-USDA Employees.

- 1 All Federal employees are eligible for monetary and nonmonetary awards for contributions which benefit the Agency or the Department.
- 2 Non-Federal employees are not eligible for monetary awards.

(4) Justification and Approval.

- (a) The AD-287-2 (see Attachment 5) must be signed by the Recommending Individual and by the Approving Official. The Approving Official must be at a higher level than the Recommending Individual. Extra effort awards must be approved in compliance with the delegations of authority (see Attachment 1).
- (b) Recommendations should be prepared and acted upon as soon as possible, normally within 60 days, after it is determined that the contribution warrants recognition.

- d. Spot Award. This is a type of extra effort award that recognizes individuals or groups of employees for their day-to-day extra efforts and contributions.

- (1) Eligibility. Employees may receive more than one spot award within a 1-year period.
 - (2) General Requirements.
 - (a) Managers, supervisors and peers may submit recommendations for spot awards.
 - (b) Award amounts range from \$50 to \$750 (in increments of \$5) with no award exceeding \$750. The employee receives the full amount of the spot award. Each program is responsible for calculating the taxes for the award (which are based on the individual employee's taxes and benefits); and budgeting for the taxes and benefits.
 - (3) Justification and Approval. Spot Awards should be awarded usually within 3 days, but no later than 30 days after completion of the accomplishment being recognized. A written justification is required separate from the AD-287-2 (see Attachment 6).
- e. Time-off Awards (TOA). A TOA may be granted to an employee as an individual or member of a group without charge to leave or loss of pay. A TOA may be awarded to recognize the same types of accomplishments as cash awards. The amount of time off granted must be proportionate to the value of the contribution being recognized.
- (1) Eligibility.
 - (a) Full-time employees may be granted up to 80 hours of time off during a leave year, but not more than 40 hours for a single achievement.
 - (b) Part-time employees may be granted time off up to the average number of work hours in the employee's biweekly scheduled tour of duty during a leave year. The limit for any single contribution for part-time employees or employees with an uncommon tour of duty is one-half of the maximum that may be granted during the leave year. For example, if an employee has a biweekly scheduled tour of duty of 64 hours, the employee may be granted up to 64 hours of time off during the leave year, but cannot be granted an award in excess of 32 hours for a single achievement.
 - (2) General Requirements.
 - (a) Use the Time-off Awards Scale found in DR-4040-451-1 to determine the appropriate number of hours for granting time off. A TOA will be given in increments of no less than one hour.

- (b) A TOA may be granted along with other forms of awards, as long as the total value of the awards given reflects the value of the contribution being recognized. For example, an employee might receive both a one-day TOA and a \$50 cash award as an award for a single contribution, as long as the combination of the awards does not exceed the value of the employee's contribution.
- (c) A TOA must be scheduled and used within 26 pay periods from the effective date of processing. After the 26th pay period, any unused time off will be automatically forfeited and may not be restored or otherwise substituted.
- (d) If an employee is incapacitated while using his/her TOA, that period may be recorded as sick leave and the time off rescheduled for another time within the 26 pay period limitation.
- (e) Unused time off will be forfeited once an employee separates or transfers to another USDA or Federal agency. If forfeited, no other awards or compensation may be substituted.

(3) Justification and Approval.

- (a) A manager or supervisor may grant a Time-off Award of 10 hours or less without a higher level of review or approval. If the award exceeds 10 hours, it must be approved by an official at a higher level than the Recommending Individual. A written justification is required separate from Form AD-287-2 (see Attachment 7).
- (b) A TOA may only be taken after it has been entered in the time and attendance system.

f. Gift Certificates. APHIS and GIPSA supervisors may not give gift certificates/cards as awards. AMS may issue further Agency guidance on the use of gift cards for recognition of AMS employees.

9. AWARDS PROCESSING

- a. Program award coordinators must review forms for accuracy and completeness before submitting to the HRD Processing Section. Upon receipt in HRD Processing, an additional quality control review will be performed before processing the award.
- b. Upon receipt in HRD Processing, the Form AD-287-2 is reviewed for compliance with regulations (signatures, justification, etc.), stamped with the date of receipt, and logged into the NFC data base.

- c. The AD-287-2 requires at least two signatures (Recommending Individual and Approving Official) before being submitted to Human Resources Processing. The Recommending Individual and the Reviewing Official can be the same person, but the Approving Official *must* be at a higher supervisory level than the Recommending Individual. Exception: Time-off awards of 10 hours or less may be granted by a manager or supervisor without a higher level of approval.
- d. All award recommendations including monetary, QSIs, and time-off awards require written justification attached to the AD-287-2 per the USDA Regulation on Employee Awards and Recognition.
- e. Awards will be processed as soon as possible after receipt in the HRD Processing Section.
- f. Timekeepers must be notified by the employee of approved time-off awards in order to update the employee's leave balance in the time and attendance system.

10. INQUIRIES

- a. This Directive can be accessed on the [APHIS/AMS](#) Administrative Issuances homepage.
- b. General inquiries on procedural matters may be directed to established administrative contacts or to the servicing personnel office. Requests for Awards and Recognition policy guidance may be directed to MRPBS, Human Resources Division, Human Resources Policy Branch at 301-851-2891.

/s/

Robert J. Huttenlocker for
Deputy Administrator
MRP Business Services

Attachments