

EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AND AWARDS

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To issue Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) policy regarding employee recognition and awards.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This directive brings VA's recognition and awards policy into alignment with the performance appraisal system. It emphasizes timely recognition of individuals and groups of employees who make contributions in support of organizational goals and objectives. In addition, the directive incorporates policy on special advancements and cash awards for title 38 employees.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Human Resources Management Employee Relations and Performance Management Service (051), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Labor Relations.
- 4. RELATED HANDBOOK:** VA Handbook 5017, "Employee Recognition and Awards."
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** Refer to the Transmittal Sheet for VA Directive 5001, "General Introduction and Administration."

CERTIFIED BY:

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

/s/
John A. Gauss
Assistant Secretary for
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EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AND AWARDS

1. PURPOSE. This directive establishes VA's policy on employee recognition and awards. It also establishes policy for special advancements for achievement and performance for title 38 and Title 38 hybrid employees as well as cash awards for registered nurses and nurse anesthetists. Procedures for implementing the policies in this directive are found in VA Handbook 5017, Employee Recognition and Awards.

2. POLICY

a. It is the policy of the Department to recognize individual employees who make contributions in support of the mission, organizational goals and objectives, and VA's Strategic Plan.

b. [The Department shall provide the opportunity for full-time, part-time and intermittent physicians, dentists, podiatrists, optometrists, chiropractors, registered nurses, nurse anesthetists, physician assistants and expanded-function dental auxiliaries appointed under authority of 38 U.S.C. 7401(1) or 7405(a)(1)(A) to be considered for a superior performance award as authorized by 38 U.S.C. 7421(a).

c.] The Department shall also provide advancement opportunities for full-time, part-time and intermittent podiatrists, optometrists, chiropractors, registered nurses, nurse anesthetists, physician assistants and expanded-function dental auxiliaries appointed under authority of 38 U.S.C. 7401(1) or 7405(a)(1)(A); and, Title 38 hybrid employees appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7401(3) or 7405(a)(1)(B). Such advancement opportunities shall be predicated on the recognition of quality service rendered, additional experience and professional attainment as determined by an examination of the employee's individual record. Advancement opportunities shall include Special Advancements for Achievement and Performance. In addition, VA's recognition and awards programs shall include cash awards for full time, part time, and intermittent registered nurses and nurse anesthetists appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7401(1) and 7405.

[d.] VA's recognition and awards programs will be administered using the following principles and practices:

(1) Recognition has its greatest impact when it is provided as soon as possible following the contribution or achievement.

(2) The views of employees and employee representatives are critical to the program's effectiveness in motivating employees.

(3) The form of recognition used should be appropriate to the contribution that was made.

(4) When a desired outcome results from a group or team effort, all contributing members of the team should be recognized. The amount of recognition per team member may vary depending on the level of contribution.

(5) Appropriate presentation and adequate publicity are important to the program.

(6) Employee representatives should be involved in the development, implementation, and review of specific recognition programs.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. **Secretary of Veterans Affairs.** The Secretary of Veterans Affairs has overall responsibility for providing leadership in the Department's Employee Recognition and Awards Program.

b. **Under Secretary for Health.** The Under Secretary for Health, or a designee, shall approve advancements of title 38 employees covered under the scope of this directive.

c. **Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration.** The Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration is responsible for the overall implementation and administration of VA's Employee Recognition and Awards Program. Included in this delegation is authority to approve all honorary awards granted by the Secretary.

d. **Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management [and Labor Relations] (DAS/HRM[&LR]).** The DAS/HRM[&LR] is responsible for:

(1) Providing program policy and guidance.

(2) Consulting with VA organizations on the appropriate use of awards and the development and implementation of organizational awards programs.

e. **Administration Heads, Assistant Secretaries, Other Key Officials, and Field Facility Directors.** Administration Heads, Assistant Secretaries, Other Key Officials and field facility directors will provide leadership to VA's employee recognition and awards program by:

(1) Providing maximum support by designating adequate resources for program administration and training.

(2) Ensuring that the latest concepts in recognition are integrated when implementing organizational award programs.

(3) Delegating to lower level officials appropriate authority to develop recognition programs and to act on awards recommendations.

(4) Evaluating the employee recognition and awards program periodically to identify specific strengths and weaknesses, develop improved procedures, and establish goals and objectives to direct future program efforts.

(5) Giving due weight to an award granted under this program in qualifying and selecting a title 5 employee for promotion as required in title 5, United States Code, section 3362 and part II of VA Handbook 5005, Staffing.

(6) Designating (an) awards liaison(s) who will provide advice, assistance and other support to ensure the effective administration of organizational awards and recognition programs.

f. **Managers, Supervisors and Group and Team Leaders.** Being in the best position to identify achievements and improvements in customer service, managers, supervisors and group and team leaders are responsible for:

(1) Being knowledgeable about the employee recognition and awards program and sharing this knowledge with employees to support the achievement of organizational goals.

(2) Identifying and recommending awards promptly for employees whose performance, contributions or ideas merit formal recognition.

(3) Supporting the employee recognition and awards program by utilizing awards in a consistent and equitable manner.

(4) Encouraging employees to submit suggestions and assisting in the development and testing of ideas when requested.

[4. AUTHORITIES. The provisions for awards for title 38 employees are regulations promulgated pursuant to 38 U.S.C. §§ 7304, 7306, 7401, 7403, 7405, 7421(a) and 7452.

5.] REFERENCES

a. 5 U.S.C., chapter 45

b. 5 CFR, part 451

c. 5 U.S.C. 5336

d. 5 CFR, part 531, subpart E

e. 5 U.S.C. 5307

f. 5 CFR, part 530, subpart B

g. 38 U.S.C. 7304, 7306, 7401, 7403, 7405 and 7452

EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AND AWARDS

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To issue Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) procedures regarding employee recognition and awards.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook sets forth mandatory procedures previously contained in numerous other issuances. No substantive changes have been made.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Human Resources Management Employee Relations and Performance Management Service (051), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Labor Relations.
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VA Directive 5017, "Employee Recognition and Awards."
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** Refer to the Transmittal Sheet for VA Handbook 5001, "General Introduction and Administration."

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EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AND AWARDS

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PART I. GENERAL PROVISIONS

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PART I. GENERAL PROVISIONS

1. PURPOSE

a. This handbook contains both mandatory Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) policies, procedures and suggested guidelines for administration of effective employee recognition and awards programs that help motivate employees to make contributions that support and enhance organizational goals and objectives.

b. This handbook also:

(1) Establishes criteria for determining eligibility for [superior performance awards and] quality step increases;

(2) Revises VA's scales of awards for granting time off and monetary awards; and

(3) Promotes the use of Special Award Programs that are directly linked to the achievement of organizational goals and objectives, including Productivity/Gainsharing Awards Program.

(4) Incorporates title 38 advancements (Special Advancements for Achievement and Performance) and cash awards policy, instructions, procedures and guidance into part V of this handbook.

2. DEFINITIONS

a. **Award.** A generic reference to the entire range of rewards available to recognize an employee under VA's Employee Recognition and Awards Program including cash, non-monetary, honorary and time off awards. (Unless otherwise noted, those title 38 employees covered under part V of this handbook are also covered under VA's Employee Recognition and Awards Program.)

b. **Employee.** For purposes of VA's Employee Recognition and Awards Program, an employee means an individual who is:

(1) Appointed in the civil service by one of the following, acting in an official capacity:

(a) The President;

(b) A Member or Members of Congress, or the Congress;

(c) A member of a uniformed service;

(d) An individual who is an employee under 5 U.S.C., section 2105;

(e) The head of a Government controlled corporation; or

(f) An adjutant general designated by the Secretary concerned under section 709(c) of title 32;

(2) Engaged in the performance of a Federal function under authority of law or an Executive act; and

(3) Subject to the supervision of an individual named by subparagraph (1) above while engaged in the performance of the duties of a position.

(4) Currently performing at a successful level. (Performance requirements for Special Advancements and awards for Exemplary Job Performance and Exemplary Job Achievement for title 38 employees are contained in part V of this handbook.)

c. **Key Officials.** For the purpose of this policy directive only, "key officials" refers to the following specified officials: Administration Heads, Assistant Secretaries, Other Key Officials within VA Central Office, and key field officials (network and field facility directors and equivalent officials).

d. **Necessary Expenses.** Costs associated with recognition under VA's awards program that enhance the honor and distinction given the award recipient(s).

e. **Superior Performance Awards.** A one-time cash award that may be granted to an employee [at the conclusion of the performance rating cycle] based on his/her rating of record. These awards [] apply to [all] title 5, [title 38 and title 38 hybrid employees who are] covered under VA's [] performance appraisal program [or proficiency report system.]

3. PAYMENT OF AWARDS AND NECESSARY EXPENSES RELATED TO EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION

a. Normally cash awards are paid by the organization(s) benefiting from the contribution. In cases where the organization primarily benefiting from the contribution is not the recipient's employing organization, funds may be transferred to the employing organization to cover the award amount.

b. When a cash award is approved by a VA organization for a suggestion or contribution made by an employee of another Federal agency, arrangements shall be made to transfer funds to the recipient's employing agency unless the administrative costs associated with transferring funds would exceed the amount of the award.

c. Superior Performance Awards will be paid as lump-sum awards and should not be considered part of the basic pay of the employee.

d. Appropriated funds may be expended to purchase award items to be used in connection with recognition granted under VA's employee recognition and awards program.

e. If deemed appropriate by the organization head or designee, travel and per diem expenses may be paid for an award recipient(s) and his or her guest or attendant to attend an awards ceremony to receive an award from the funds or appropriations available to the organization to which the employee is assigned, the organization primarily benefiting from the contribution, or from several funds or appropriations of the various organizations benefiting.

f. Appropriated funds may be expended to pay for ceremonial expenses (see part IV, appendix B of this handbook for information on planning a ceremony) and to furnish light refreshments at awards ceremonies when:

(1) The ceremony is truly "ceremonial" and is not a part of the organization's typical day-to-day activities; and

(2) A determination is made by the organization head that light refreshments would enhance the effectiveness of the awards ceremony; and

(3) [Guidance published by the Office of Finance titled Incentive Awards Ceremony Expenses/Gifts and Mementos, Volume II, Chapter 4] offers guidance on necessary expenses associated with an awards ceremony.

g. Decisions regarding other expenses in connection with awards that involve expenditure of appropriated funds will be determined based on application of relevant Comptroller General decisions and VA financial policy. A summary of Comptroller General decisions relevant to the employee recognition program is located in part III, appendix E of this handbook.

h. Expenses for appropriate promotion, publicity and administration of awards may be incurred at the discretion of key officials as a necessary expense of administering their awards programs in accordance with VA financial policy. Necessary expenses may include appropriate items which enhance the ceremony and presentation of awards.

4. COMBINATION AWARDS. Authorized combinations of awards include cash and honorary; time off and honorary; cash and time off; and in extraordinary cases, cash and a Quality Step Increase (QSI) or time off and a QSI. To ensure compliance with the intent of applicable laws and regulations, adhere to the following guidelines when granting combination awards.

a. **Combining Cash or Time Off With a QSI.** QSI's by themselves are substantial awards that affect everything from current and future compensation budgets, to the recipient's retirement benefits. Therefore, the granting of QSI's along with a cash or time off award should be rare, and done only in circumstances where there is extraordinary performance or contributions to organizational goals during a rating period.

b. **Don't Exceed the Value of the Accomplishment.** The value of an employee's accomplishment(s) should always be determined by using either the Scale of Awards Based on Tangible Benefits or the Scale of Awards Based on Intangible Benefits (see Appendix A to Part III of this handbook). Time off is not a cash award, but it does have an intrinsic value. This value can be determined by multiplying the amount the employee makes per hour by the number of hours of time off. For the purpose of this procedure, the value of a QSI is the increase to the employees pay the first year. Therefore, if the value of the employee's accomplishment(s) is/are, e.g., \$2000, a supervisor may give an employee making \$25 per hour 20 hours of time off (20 X \$25/hr. = \$500), and a \$1500 cash award. Under extraordinary circumstances, if the same employee's accomplishments during the rating year are valued at \$3500, and a QSI would be a \$3000 increase to pay, the employee could receive a QSI and \$500 cash—or a QSI and up to 20 hours of time off.

c. **Different Levels of Approval.** In order to ensure that the granting of combination awards is reasonable and appropriate, one of the two parts of the award should be approved at a level above the approval official for the first award. Note that it should be clearly stated in the justification of the award going to the higher level approval official that the award is part of a combination award.

5. AUTHORITY TO APPROVE AWARDS. Authority to approve awards is subject to the provisions outlined below except that as a courtesy, any award being recommended for an employee of another organization should receive concurrence by the appropriate official in the employing organization.

a. **Cash Awards.** All cash awards must be approved at a higher management level than that which recommended. However, key officials, including the Secretary and Deputy Secretary, may act as both the recommending and approving official on all monetary awards within their delegated approval authority.

(1) Under Secretaries, [] Assistant Secretaries and other Central Office organization heads may approve special contribution, superior performance and productivity/gainsharing awards up to and including \$7,500 for individual employees under their jurisdiction, awards of up to and including \$10,000 for individuals as suggestion awards, and group special contribution awards of up to \$25,000 provided no member of the group receives more than \$7,500. This authority may be re-delegated.

(2) The Secretary may approve individual cash awards up to \$10,000 and may approve group awards in excess of \$10,000 providing no one group member receives more than \$10,000.

(3) The Under Secretary for Health's delegation of authority for incentive awards may be found in VA Handbook 5017, Part I, Appendix B.

(4) The Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs' delegation of authority for incentive awards may be found in VA Handbook 5017, Part I, Appendix C.

(5) The Under Secretary for Benefits' delegation of authority for incentive awards may be found in VA Handbook 5017, Part I, Appendix D.

(6) Awards for an individual employee in excess of \$10,000 up to \$25,000 must be reviewed and approved by the Office of Personnel Management.

[(7) During a fiscal year, no employee is authorized to receive individual or group special contribution awards that would result in an employee receiving a cumulative amount that exceeds the approving official's maximum dollar limit for an individual special contribution award, unless approved by the appropriate Under Secretary, or designee as outlined in Part I, Appendices B, C and D, or Assistant Secretary. The cumulative amount described in this paragraph is for special contribution awards only. Other categories of awards, such as superior

performance awards, suggestion awards, on-the-spot awards, productivity/gainsharing awards, etc., do not impact the cumulative dollar limit for special contribution awards.]

b. **Time Off Awards.** Key officials are authorized to approve time off awards up to 40 hours. Unless otherwise covered in a supplemental organizational policy issued by a key official, all time off awards in excess of 1 work day must be approved at a higher level than the individual who recommended the award.

c. **Honor Awards.** The Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration is authorized to approve Secretary's awards. Key officials are authorized to approve organizational honor awards and may delegate that authority to lower levels.

[6.] AWARD RESTRICTIONS

a. **Aggregate Salary Limitation.** The amount of combined basic pay, allowance, differential, bonus award or other cash payment that an employee can receive during the calendar year is limited to the salary of Executive Level 1, except for title 38 physicians and dentists where the calendar year limitation is the salary of the President of the United States. Should this limitation be a concern when recommending recognition for an employee, consult with your organization’s finance officer for assistance in determining the projected total compensation for that individual through the end of the calendar year.

b. **Limitations during Presidential Election (5 U.S.C. 4508).** During the period beginning June 1 in a calendar year in which a Presidential election occurs, and ending January 20 following the date of the election, monetary awards may not be granted to:

(1) An individual in a Senior Executive Service position who is not a career appointee as defined in 5 U.S.C. 3132(a)(4); or

(2) An individual in an excepted service position of a confidential or policy-determining nature (schedule C).

c. **Employees in Executive Schedule Positions (5 U.S.C. 4509).** In accordance with law, a cash award may not be granted to:

(1) An individual in an Executive Schedule position; or

(2) An individual for which pay is set in statute by reference to a section or level of the Executive Schedule.

[7.] AWARD AND SUGGESTION RECORDS

a. A case number will be assigned for identification and coding purposes to each cash, honorary and time off award.

b. Awards must be documented, filed and reported in accordance with OPM requirements. Each servicing human resources office will maintain employee recognition records, including the forms and the justification/documentation to support award actions, for a period of 2 years from the approval date. Records of employee suggestions and the action taken on them will be retained for a period of 2 years from the date of final action on the suggestion.

c. Form SF-50B, Notification of Personnel Action, which documents approved cash and honor awards will be filed on the left hand side of the personnel folder. Only Form SF-50B documenting Quality Step Increases will be permanently filed on the right hand side in the employee’s personnel folder. A copy of VA Forms 4659/4659a, 4239 or equivalent form produced for use with a special award program, along with supporting documentation, must be retained by either the organization’s award liaison for the HRM office for a period of 2 years from the approval date. A copy of VA Forms 4659, 4239, or equivalent, may be filed in the employee’s Employee Performance File. See the General Records Schedule 1, items 12 and 13, for additional retention requirements related to incentive awards.

APPENDIX A. TYPES OF EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION

	AWARD	RECOGNIZES	FORM OF RECOGNITION	JUSTIFICATION NEEDED	ELIGIBILITY
[AWARDS BASED ON A SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTION]	Special Contribution Award [SCA] includes "On-the-Spot" and Time Off Awards.	A contribution, act, service, or achievement that benefits VA/ Government. See part III and its appendix B for examples of contributions.	SCA - Cash Award of up to \$7,500 for an individual and \$25,000 for a group based on tangible and/or intangible benefits to VA/Federal Government. On-the-Spot - Minimal Cash Award, usually \$150 or less, that is granted as soon as possible after contribution of limited impact is made. May also include a non-monetary award item. Time Off - from 4 to 40 hours for a specific contribution. Employee may receive up to 80 hours during a 12-month period.	Narrative description of act and how it benefited government. See part III, appendix D. Can document SCAs using VA Form 4659a.	Individual employees, groups or teams (SES ineligible for Time Off Awards.)
	[] Gainsharing Award	Improvements in performance as increases in productivity that result in more effective efficient use of resources.	Typically cash award based on pre-determined formula for measuring and sharing gains distributed to employees who produce gains.	Sufficient data to demonstrate improvements in quality, quantity and/or timeliness realized and basis for each employee's share based on increases in productivity.	Individual employees, groups or teams.

APPENDIX A. EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AT A GLANCE (CONTINUED)

	AWARD	RECOGNIZES	FORM OF RECOGNITION	JUSTIFICATION NEEDED	ELIGIBILITY
[AWARDS BASED ON PERFORMANCE]	[] Superior Performance Award	Sustained performance beyond normal job requirements as reflected in the employee's most recent rating of record.	A one-time cash award with the amount determined by the employee's performance rating.	A complete copy of the employee's performance appraisal [or proficiency report] and a narrative description of any factors that were considered but not [described] in the appraisal, e.g., the employee's self-assessment.	Employees covered under VA's performance management system [or proficiency report system.]
	Quality Step Increase	Exceptional performance during the most recent performance appraisal cycle.	Adjustment in base pay to next step of grade.	Narrative description demonstrating exceptional performance on all job elements and how performance contributed to accomplishment of organizational goals and objectives.	Individual GS employees only.

APPENDIX A. EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AT A GLANCE (CONTINUED)

[OTHER AWARDS]	Honor Award	Contributions or achievements that are unique and deserving of recognition beyond or other than that provided by cash.	Typically a plaque, certificate, medal, desk item or other item used to bestow honor.	Narrative description of contribution or achievement being recognized by the particular award and benefits to VA.	Individual employees, groups of employees.
	Non-monetary Award	Contributions or achievements that may not warrant a cash award or may supplement a cash or time off award.	Award items of nominal value such as pen-and-pencil sets, mugs, water bottles, desk organizers, etc. whose primary value is as a form of recognition and not as an object with monetary value.	Brief narrative description of contribution or achievement being recognized by the particular type of award.	Individual employees, groups of employees.

[APPENDIX B. VHA DELEGATION OF APPROVAL AUTHORITY FOR SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION, PERFORMANCE, SUGGESTION, AND TIME OFF AWARDS; AND, QUALITY STEP INCREASES

1. DEFINITIONS

a. **Special Contribution Award.** For the purpose of this handbook, a special contribution award refers to a cash award given for a special contribution made by an individual or group of individuals, for on-the-spot recognition, or for achievement of productivity/gainsharing/goalsharing program.

b. **Superior Performance Award.** A one-time cash award that may be granted to a title 5, title 38 or title 38 hybrid employee based on his/her performance appraisal rating of record provided that the rating of record is at the fully successful level (or equivalent) or above.

c. **Suggestion.** Employee suggestions are ideas that define a problem or objective, present a solution or plan for improvement and tell how the solution will improve the efficiency, economy or effectiveness of government operations or otherwise benefit the government.

d. **Time Off Award.** Time Off Awards are time off from 4 to 40 hours (or 1-5 days for VHA full-time physicians, dentists, optometrists, and podiatrists) in recognition of a specific contribution.

e. **Title 5 Quality Step Increase (QSI).** A QSI is an increase to an employee's rate of basic pay from one step of the grade to the next step that is granted in recognition of excellence in performance during the last appraisal cycle. The purpose of a QSI is to recognize, on an individual basis, consistently high achievers by granting faster than normal step increases.

2. SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION AWARDS

a. **Delegations**

(1) **VHA Central Office**

(a) Deputy Under Secretaries for Health, or their designees; VA Central Office (VACO) chief officers; and the Dean, VA Learning University, are authorized to approve up to and including **\$7,500** for individual special contribution awards and up to and including **\$25,000** for group special contribution awards for eligible Senior Executive Service (SES) and title 38 equivalents, title 5 employees, title 38 employees, and title 38 hybrid employees so long as no one employee receives more than \$7,500.

(b) VACO chief consultants and staff office directors are authorized to approve up to and including **\$5,000** for individual special contribution awards and up to and including **\$16,500** for group special contribution awards for title 5 employees, title 38 employees and title 38 hybrid employees so long as no one employee receives more than \$5,000.

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(2) VHA Field Facilities

(a) Field Network directors are authorized to approve up to and including **\$7,500** for individual special contribution awards and up to and including **\$25,000** for group special contribution awards for eligible SES and title 38 equivalents, title 5 employees, title 38 employees and title 38 hybrid employees so long as no one employee receives more than **\$7,500**. **Approval authority may be re-delegated as appropriate.**

(b) Field facility directors are authorized to approve up to and including **\$5,000** for individual special contribution awards and up to and including **\$16,000** for group special contribution awards for title 5 employees, title 38 employees, and title 38 hybrid employees so long as no one employee receives more than **\$5,000**. **Approval authority may be re-delegated as appropriate.**

b. Restrictions

(1) When approving group special contribution awards, the award amount for any employee within a group cannot exceed the approving official's dollar limit for an individual special contribution award (e.g., a field facility director can approve group special contribution awards up to and including \$16,000 as long as the award amount for any employee within the group does not exceed \$5,000). [During a fiscal year, no employee is authorized to receive one or more individual or group special contribution awards that would result in an employee receiving a cumulative amount that exceeds the approving official's maximum dollar limit for an individual special contribution award, unless approved by the Under Secretary for Health, who may redelegate approval authority to the Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health, the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Operations and Management, or the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Policy and Services. For example, field facility directors are authorized to approve up to and including \$5,000 for individual special contribution awards. Therefore, during each fiscal year, a field facility director may not approve a cumulative number of special contribution awards that would result in an employee receiving more than \$5,000 during each fiscal year. Any special contribution award that is recommended for approval that would result in the employee receiving more than \$5,000 in a fiscal year must be routed through appropriate channels to the Under Secretary for Health, or designee, for final approval. The cumulative amount described in this paragraph is for special contribution awards only. Other categories of awards, such as superior performance awards, suggestion awards, on-the-spot awards, productivity/gainsharing awards, etc., do not impact the cumulative dollar limit for special contribution awards.]

(2) Award amounts must be consistent with the Scales of Awards Based on Tangible and Intangible Benefits located in VA Handbook 5017, Part III, Appendix A.

(3) Only Field Network and facility directors may act as both the recommending and approving official. Otherwise, the approving official must be at a higher management level than the official who recommended the award.

(4) See VA Handbook 5017, Part I, paragraph 6, for additional award restrictions.

3. SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE AWARDS

a. Delegations

(1) VHA Central Office

(a) Deputy Under Secretaries for Health, or their designees; VA Central Office (VACO) chief officers; and the Dean, VA Learning University are authorized to approve up to and including **\$7,500** for an individual performance award for eligible SES and title 38 equivalent employees, title 5 employees, title 38 employees and title 38 hybrid employees.

(b) VACO chief consultants and staff office directors are authorized to approve up to and including **\$5,000** for an individual performance award for title 5 employees, title 38 employees and title 38 hybrid employees.

(2) VHA Field Facilities

(a) Field Network directors are authorized to approve up to and including **\$7,500** for an individual performance award for eligible SES and title 38 equivalent employees, title 5 employees, title 38 employees and title 38 hybrid employees.

(b) Field facility directors are authorized to approve up to and including **\$5,000** for an individual performance award for title 5 employees, title 38 employees, and title 38 hybrid employees.

b. Restrictions

(1) Performance awards may only be awarded if the rating of record for title 5, title 38 and title 38 hybrid employees is at the fully successful level (or equivalent) or above.

(2) The process used for calculating performance awards must ensure a meaningful distinction is made so that employees with higher ratings of record receive larger cash awards than those with lower ratings of record. For example, a GS-5 with an outstanding rating must receive a higher dollar amount than a GS-5 who received a highly successful rating.

(3) Meaningful distinctions must be made at the level award decisions are made. For example, if performance award decisions are made at the medical center level then all awards within that regional level must reflect a meaningful distinction.

(4) Only Field Network and facility directors may act as both the recommending and approving official. Otherwise, the approving official must be at a higher management level than the official who recommended the performance award.

4. SUGGESTION AWARDS

a. Delegations

(1) VHA Central Office

(a) The Deputy Under Secretaries for Health, or their designees, are authorized to approve up to and including **\$10,000** for individual and group suggestion awards for employees.

(b) VACO chief officers and the Dean, VA Learning University, are authorized to approve up to and including **\$7,500** for individual and group suggestion awards for employees.

(c) VACO chief consultants and staff office directors are authorized to approve up to and including **\$5,000** for individual and group suggestion awards for employees.

**PART I
APPENDIX B**

(2) VHA Field Facilities

(a) Field Network directors are authorized to approve up to and including **\$7,500** for individual and group suggestion awards for employees. **Approval authority may be re-delegated, as appropriate.**

(b) Field facility directors are authorized to approve up to and including **\$5,000** for individual and group suggestion awards for employees. **Approval authority may be re-delegated, as appropriate.**

b. Restrictions

(1) In order to qualify for a cash award, adopted suggestions must have measurable dollar benefits of at least \$250, or intangible benefits of comparable value, or a combination of both.

(2) In determining the amount of the award for adopted suggestions, the appropriate scale of awards in Appendix A to Part III of VA Handbook 5017 will be used.

(3) Only Field Network and facility directors may act as both the recommending and approving official. Otherwise, the approving official must be at a higher management level than the official who recommended the award.

5. TIME OFF AWARDS

a. Delegations

(1) VHA Central Office

(a) Deputy Under Secretaries for Health, or their designees; VACO chief officers; and the Dean, VA Learning University, are authorized to approve time off awards up to and including **40 hours** for eligible employees.

(b) VACO chief consultants and staff office directors are authorized to approve time off awards up to and including **32 hours** for eligible employees.

(2) **VHA Field Facilities.** Field Network and facility directors are authorized to approve time off awards of up to and including **40 hours** for eligible employees. **Approval authority may be re-delegated, as appropriate.**

b. Restrictions

(1) Employees in the SES and equivalents appointed under title 5 are excluded from receiving time off awards.

(2) The minimum time off award is 4 hours, except for VHA full-time title 38 employees paid on a daily basis, who may only be granted time off in increments of 1 day (8 hours equivalent).

(3) Not more than 40 hours may be granted to an employee for a specific contribution.

(4) The maximum amount of time off that may be granted to any employee during a 12-month period is 80 hours. Normally, each time off award must be used within 180 days after the date on which it was approved. At the request of the employee, a supervisor may extend the period of time to use a time off award for an additional 180 days. In no case may the total period for use of the award exceed 1 year from the date the time off award was granted.

(5) The number of hours granted for a time off award must be consistent with the Scale of Time Off Awards located in VA Handbook 5017, Part III, Appendix F.

(6) Only Field Network and facility directors may act as both the recommending and approving official. Otherwise, all time off awards in excess of 1 day must be approved by an official at a higher management level than that which recommended the award.

6. TITLE 5 QSIs

a. Delegations

(1) VHA Central Office

(a) Deputy Under Secretaries for Health, or their designees; VACO chief officers; and the Dean, VA Learning University, are authorized to approve QSIs for title 5 employees in pay categories through the **GS-15 level** under their jurisdiction.

(b) VACO chief consultants and staff office directors are authorized to approve QSIs for title 5 employees in pay categories through the **GS-14 level**.

(2) **VHA Field Facilities.** Field Network and facility directors are authorized to approve QSIs for title 5 employees in pay categories through the **GS-15 level**. **Approval authority may be re-delegated, as appropriate.**

b. Restrictions

(1) Only General Schedule employees appointed under title 5 are eligible to receive QSIs.

(2) A QSI may not be granted to an eligible employee who has received a QSI within the preceding 52 consecutive calendar weeks.

(3) A QSI may not be granted to an eligible employee who is in step 10 of the pay grade.

(4) Only Field Network and facility directors may act as both the recommending and approving official. Otherwise, the approving official must be at a higher management level than the official who recommended the QSI.]

[APPENDIX C. NCA DELEGATION OF APPROVAL AUTHORITY FOR SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION, PERFORMANCE, SUGGESTION, AND TIME OFF AWARDS; AND, QUALITY STEP INCREASES

1. DEFINITIONS

a. **Special Contribution Award.** For the purpose of this handbook, a special contribution award refers to a cash award given for a special contribution made by an individual or group of individuals, for on-the-spot recognition, or for achievement of productivity/gainsharing/goalsharing program.

b. **Superior Performance Award.** A one-time cash award that may be granted to an employee based on his/her rating of record provided that the rating of record is at the fully successful level (or equivalent) or above.

c. **Suggestion.** Employee suggestions are ideas that define a problem or objective, present a solution or plan for improvement and tell how the solution will improve the efficiency, economy or effectiveness of government operations or otherwise benefit the government.

d. **Time Off Award.** Time off awards are time off from 4 to 40 hours in recognition of a specific contribution.

e. **Title 5 Quality Step Increase (QSI).** A QSI is an increase to an employee's rate of basic pay from one step of the grade to the next step that is granted in recognition of excellence in performance during the last appraisal cycle. The purpose of a QSI is to recognize, on an individual basis, consistently high achievers by granting faster than normal step increases.

2. SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION AWARD

a. **Delegations**

(1) **VA Central Office**

(a) The Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs is authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$7,500** for individual special contribution and up to and including **\$25,000** for group special contribution awards for all eligible employees so long as no one employee receives more than **\$7,500**.

(b) The Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs is authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$5,000** for individual special contribution awards and up to and including **\$15,000** for group special contribution awards for all eligible employees so long as no one employee receives more than **\$5000**.

(c) The Director of Office of Field Programs, Office of Finance and Planning, Communication Management Service, Management Support Service, State Cemetery Grants Service, Office of Construction Management, Information Technology and Business Requirement Services are authorized

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to recommend and approve up to and including **\$4,000** for individual special contribution awards and up to and including **\$10,000** for group special contribution awards for all eligible employees so long as no employee receives more than **\$4,000**.

(d) Service directors in VACO are authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$3,000** for individual special contribution awards and up to and including **\$8,000** for group special contribution awards for all eligible employees so long as no employee receives more than **\$3,000**.

(2) Field Facilities

(a) Memorial Service Network (MSN) directors are authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$3,000** for individual special contribution awards and up to and including **\$8,000** for group special contribution awards for all eligible employees so long as no one employee receives more than **\$3,000**.

(b) Cemetery directors at the:

(1) GS-13 and GS-14 grade levels are authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$2,000** for individual special contribution awards and up to and including **\$5,000** for group special contribution awards for all eligible employees so long as no one employee receives more than **\$2,000**.

(2) GS-11 and GS-12 grade levels are authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$1,500** for individual special contribution awards and up to and including **\$3,500** for group special contribution awards for all eligible employees so long as no one employee receives more than **\$1,500**.

(3) GS-9 grade level are authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$1,000** for individual special contribution awards and up to and including **\$2,000** for group special contribution awards for all eligible employees so long as no one employee receives more than **\$1,000**.

b. Restrictions

(1) When approving group special contribution awards, the award amount for any employee within a group cannot exceed the approving official's dollar limit for an individual special contribution award (e.g., a MSN director can approve group special contribution awards up to and including \$8,000 as long as the award amount for any employee within the group does not exceed \$3,000. [During a fiscal year, no employee is authorized to receive one or more individual or group special contribution awards that would result in an employee receiving a cumulative amount that exceeds the approving official's maximum dollar limit for an individual special contribution award, unless approved by the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, who may redelegate approval authority to the Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs. For example, Memorial Service directors are authorized to approve up to and including \$3,000 for

individual special contribution awards. Therefore, during each fiscal year, a Memorial Service director may not approve a cumulative number of special contribution awards that would result in an employee receiving more than \$3,000 during each fiscal year. Any special contribution award that is recommended for approval that would result in the employee receiving more than \$3,000 in a fiscal year must be routed through appropriate channels to the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs for final approval. The cumulative amount described in this paragraph is for special contribution awards only. Other categories of awards, such as superior performance awards, suggestion awards, on-the-spot awards, productivity/gainsharing awards, etc., do not impact the cumulative dollar limit for special contribution awards.]

(2) Award amounts must be consistent with the Scales of Awards Based on Tangible and Intangible Benefits located in VA Handbook 5017, Part III, Appendix A.

(3) See VA Handbook 5017, Part I, paragraph 6, for additional award restrictions.

3. SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE AWARD

a. Delegations

(1) VA Central Office

(a) The Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs is authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$7,500** for individual performance awards.

(b) The Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs is authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$5,000** for individual performance awards.

(c) The Director of Office of Field Programs, Office of Finance and Planning, Communication Management Service, Management Support Service, State Cemetery Grants Service, Office of Construction Management, Information Technology and Business Requirement Services are authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$4,000** for individual performance awards.

(d) Service directors in VACO are authorized to recommend and approve up to an including **\$3,000** for individual performance awards.

(2) Field Facilities

(a) MSN directors are authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$3,000** for individual performance awards.

(b) Cemetery directors at the:

(1) GS-13 and GS-14 grade levels are authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$2,000** for individual performance awards.

(2) GS-11 and GS-12 grade levels are authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$1,500** for individual performance awards.

(3) GS-9 grade level is authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$1,000** for individual performance awards.

b. Restrictions

(1) Performance awards may only be awarded if the rating of record is at the fully successful level (or equivalent) or above.

(2) Performance awards must make meaningful distinctions based on levels of performance. Employees with higher ratings of record must receive a higher dollar amount than those with lower ratings of record. For example, a GS-5 with an outstanding rating must receive a higher dollar amount than a GS-5 who received a highly successful rating.

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(3) Meaningful distinctions in award amounts must be made at the level the award decisions are made. For example, if performance award decisions are made at the cemetery director level then all awards authorized by that director must reflect a meaningful distinction.

4. SUGGESTION AWARD

a. Delegations

(1) VA Central Office

(a) The Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs is authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$10,000** for individual and group suggestion awards for all eligible employees.

(b) The Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs is authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$7,500** for individual and group suggestion awards for all eligible employees.

(c) The Director of Office of Field Programs, Office of Finance and Planning, Communication Management Service, Management Support Service, State Cemetery Grants Service, Office of Construction Management, Information Technology and Business Requirement Services are authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$5,000** for individual and group suggestion awards for all eligible employees.

(d) Service directors in VACO are authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$3,000** for individual and group suggestion awards for all eligible employees.

(2) Field Facilities

(a) MSN directors are authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$3,000** for individual and group suggestion awards for all eligible employees.

(b) Cemetery directors at the:

(1) GS-13 and GS-14 grade levels are authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$2,000** for individual and group suggestion awards for all eligible employees.

(2) GS-11 and GS-12 grade levels are authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$1,500** for individual and group suggestion awards for all eligible employees.

(3) GS-9 grade level are authorized to recommend and approve up to and including **\$1,000** for individual and group suggestion awards for all eligible employees.

b. Restrictions

(1) In order to qualify for a cash award, adopted suggestions must have measurable dollar benefits of at least \$250, or intangible benefits of comparable value, or a combination of both.

(2) In determining the amount of the award for adopted suggestions, the appropriate scale of awards in Appendix A to Part III of VA Handbook 5017 will be used.

5. TIME OFF AWARD

a. Delegations

(1) VA Central Office

(a) The Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs and Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs are authorized to recommend and approve time off awards up to and including **40 hours** for all eligible employees.

(b) The Director of Office of Field Programs, Office of Finance and Planning, Communication Management Service, Management Support Service, State Cemetery Grants Service, Office of Construction Management, Information Technology and Business Requirement Services are authorized to recommend and approve time off awards up to and including **27 hours (or the equivalent of 3 workdays)** for all eligible employees.

(c) Service directors in VACO are authorized to recommend and approve time off awards up to and including **18 hours (or the equivalent of 2 workdays)** for all eligible employees.

(2) Field Facilities

(a) MSN directors are authorized to recommend and approve time off awards up to and including **18 hours (or the equivalent of 2 workdays)** for all eligible employees.

(b) Cemetery directors are authorized to recommend and approve time off awards up to and including **8 hours (or the equivalent of 1 workday)** for all eligible employees.

b. Restrictions

(1) Employees in the Senior Executive Service (SES) and equivalents appointed under title 5 are excluded from receiving time off awards.

(2) The minimum time off award is 4 hours and not more than 40 hours may be granted to an employee for a specific contribution.

(3) The maximum amount of time off that may be granted to any employee during a 12-month period is 80 hours and recipients must use the time off award within 180 days. At the request of the employee, a supervisor may extend the period of time to use a time off award for an additional 180 days. In no

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case may the total period for use of the award exceed 1 year from the date the time off award was granted.

(4) The number of hours granted for a time off award must be consistent with the Scale of Time Off Awards located in VA Handbook 5017, Part III, Appendix F.

6. TITLE 5 QSIs**a. Delegations**

(1) **VA Central Office.** The Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs; Deputy Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs; and the Director of Office of Field Programs, Office of Finance and Planning, Communication Management Service, Management Support Service, State Cemetery Grants Service, Office of Construction Management, Information Technology and Business Requirement Services are authorized to recommend and approve QSIs.

(2) Field Facilities

(a) MSN directors are authorized to recommend and approve QSIs for all eligible employees.

(b) Cemetery directors may recommend QSIs and route to MSN directors for approval.

b. Restrictions

(1) Only General Schedule employees appointed under title 5 are eligible to receive QSIs.

(2) A QSI may not be granted to an eligible employee who has received a QSI within the preceding 52 consecutive calendar weeks.

(3) A QSI may not be granted to an eligible employee who is in step 10 of the pay grade.

7. ADDITIONAL DELEGATIONS. Service directors and cemetery directors may delegate their authority to recommend or approve (but not both) to the next lower level supervisor. The award amount associated with this delegation will not exceed 75% of the original delegated authority.]

[APPENDIX D. VBA DELEGATION OF APPROVAL AUTHORITY FOR
SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION, PERFORMANCE, SUGGESTION, AND
TIME OFF AWARDS; AND, QUALITY STEP INCREASES

1. DEFINITIONS

a. **Special Contribution Award.** For the purpose of this handbook, a special contribution award refers to a cash award given for a special contribution made by an individual or group of individuals, for on-the-spot recognition, or for achievement of productivity/gainsharing/goalsharing program.

b. **Superior Performance Award.** A one-time cash award that may be granted to an employee based on his/her rating of record provided that the rating of record is at the fully successful level (or equivalent) or above.

c. **Suggestion.** Employee suggestions are ideas that define a problem or objective, present a solution or plan for improvement and tell how the solution will improve the efficiency, economy or effectiveness of government operations or otherwise benefit the government.

d. **Time Off Award.** Time Off Awards are time off from 4 to 40 hours in recognition of a specific contribution.

e. **Title 5 Quality Step Increase (QSI).** A QSI is an increase to an employee's rate of basic pay from one step of the grade to the next step that is granted in recognition of excellence in performance during the last appraisal cycle. The purpose of a QSI is to recognize, on an individual basis, consistently high achievers by granting faster than normal step increases.

2. SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION AWARDS

a. **Delegations**

(1) **VBA Central Office**

(a) The Under Secretary for Benefits and Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits are authorized to approve up to and including **\$7,500** for individual special contribution awards and up to and including **\$25,000** for group special contribution awards so long as no one employee receives more than \$7,500.

(b) Associate Deputy Under Secretaries (Policy and Programs, Field Operations, and Management), the Chief of Staff, the Chief Financial Officer and Area Directors (Central, East, South and West) are authorized to approve up to and including **\$5,000** for individual special contribution awards and up to and including **\$10,000** for group special contribution awards so long as no one employee receives more than \$5,000.

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(2) **VBA Regional Offices.** Regional, Service, and Staff Office directors are authorized to approve up to and including **\$3,500** for individual special contribution awards and up to and including **\$7,000** for group special contribution awards so long as no one employee receives more than \$3,500.

b. Restrictions

(1) When approving group special contribution awards, the award amount for any employee within a group cannot exceed the approving official's dollar limit for an individual special contribution award (e.g., a regional director can approve group special contribution awards up to and including \$7,000 as long as the award amount for any employee within the group does not exceed \$3,500.) [During a fiscal year, no employee is authorized to receive one or more individual or group special contribution awards that would result in an employee receiving a cumulative amount that exceeds the approving official's maximum dollar limit for an individual special contribution award, unless approved by the Under Secretary for Benefits, who may redelegate approval authority to the Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits. For example, Regional Office directors are authorized to approve up to and including \$3,500 for individual special contribution awards. Therefore, during each fiscal year, a Regional Office director may not approve a cumulative number of special contribution awards that would result in an employee receiving more than \$3,500 during each fiscal year. Any special contribution award that is recommended for approval that would result in the employee receiving more than \$3,500 in a fiscal year must be routed through appropriate channels to the Under Secretary for Benefits for final approval. The cumulative amount described in this paragraph is for special contribution awards only. Other categories of awards, such as superior performance awards, suggestion awards, on-the-spot awards, productivity/gainsharing awards, etc., do not impact the cumulative dollar limit for special contribution awards.]

(2) Award amounts must be consistent with the Scales of Awards Based on Tangible and Intangible Benefits located in VA Handbook 5017, Part III, Appendix A.

(3) See VA Handbook 5017, Part I, paragraph 6, for additional award restrictions.

3. SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE AWARDS

a. Delegations

(1) VBA Central Office

(a) The Under Secretary for Benefits and Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits are authorized to approve up to and including **\$7,500** for an individual performance award.

(b) Associate Deputy Under Secretaries (Policy and Programs, Field Operations, and Management), the Chief of Staff, the Chief Financial Officer and Area Directors (Central, East, South and West) are authorized to approve up to and including **\$5,000** for an individual performance award.

(2) **VBA Regional Offices.** Regional, Service and Staff Office directors are authorized to approve up to and including **\$3,500** for an individual performance award.

b. Restrictions

(1) Performance awards may only be awarded if the rating of record is at the fully successful level (or equivalent) or above.

(2) Performance awards must make meaningful distinctions based on levels of performance. Employees with higher ratings of record must receive a higher dollar amount than those with lower ratings of record. For example, a GS-5 with an outstanding rating must receive a higher dollar amount than a GS-5 who received a highly successful rating.

(3) Meaningful distinctions must be made at the level award decisions are made. For example, if performance award decisions are made at the regional level then all awards within that regional level must reflect a meaningful distinction.

4. SUGGESTION AWARDS

a. Delegations

(1) VBA Central Office

a. The Under Secretary for Benefits and Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits, or their designees, are authorized to approve up to and including **\$10,000** for individual and group suggestion awards for employees.

b. Associate Deputy Under Secretaries (Policy and Programs, Field Operations, and Management), the Chief of Staff, the Chief Financial Officer and Area Directors (Central, East, South and West) are authorized to approve up to and including **\$5,000** for individual and group suggestion awards for employees.

(2) **VBA Regional Offices.** Regional, Service, and Staff Office directors are authorized to approve up to and including **\$1,000** for individual and group suggestion awards for employees.

b. Restrictions

(1) In order to qualify for a cash award, adopted suggestions must have measurable dollar benefits of at least \$250, or intangible benefits of comparable value, or a combination of both.

(2) In determining the amount of the award for adopted suggestions, the appropriate scale of awards in Appendix A to Part III of VA Handbook 5017 will be used.

5. TIME OFF AWARDS

a. Delegations

(1) VBA Central Office

(a) The Under Secretary for Benefits or Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits, or their designees, are authorized to approve time off awards up to and including **40 hours** for employees.

(b) Associate Deputy Under Secretaries (Policy and Programs, Field Operations, and Management), the Chief of Staff, the Chief Financial Officer and Area Directors (Central, East, South and West) are authorized to approve time off awards up to and including **32 hours** for employees.

(2) **VBA Regional Offices.** Regional, Service, and Staff Office directors are authorized to approve time off awards of up to and including **24 hours** for employees.

b. Restrictions

(1) Employees in the Senior Executive Service (SES) and equivalents appointed under title 5 are excluded from receiving time off awards.

(2) The minimum time off award is 4 hours and not more than 40 hours may be granted to an employee for a specific contribution.

(3) The maximum amount of time off that may be granted to any employee during a 12-month period is 80 hours and recipients must use the time off award within 180 days. At the request of the employee, a supervisor may extend the period of time to use a time off award for an additional 180 days. In no case may the total period for use of the award exceed 1 year from the date the time off award was granted.

(4) The number of hours granted for a time off award must be consistent with the Scale of Time Off Awards located in VA Handbook 5017, Part III, Appendix F.

6. TITLE 5 QSIs

a. Delegations

(1) VBA Central Office

a. The Under Secretary for Benefits or Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits, or their designees, are authorized to approve QSIs for title 5 employees in pay categories through the GS-15 level under their jurisdiction.

b. Associate Deputy Under Secretaries (Policy and Programs, Field Operations, and Management), the Chief of Staff, the Chief Financial Officer, Area Directors (Central, East, South and West) and Regional Offices are authorized to approve QSIs for title 5 employees in pay categories through the GS-15 level under their jurisdiction.

b. Restrictions

(1) Only General Schedule employees appointed under title 5 are eligible to receive QSIs.

(2) A QSI may not be granted to an eligible employee who has received a QSI within the preceding 52 consecutive calendar weeks.

(3) A QSI may not be granted to an eligible employee who is in step 10 of the pay grade.]

EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AND AWARDS

PART II. EMPLOYEE IDEAS AND INVENTIONS

CONTENTS

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PART II. EMPLOYEE IDEAS AND INVENTIONS

1. GENERAL PROVISIONS

a. To be accepted as a suggestion, the idea must be submitted in writing, define a problem or objective, present a solution or plan for improvement and tell how the solution will improve the efficiency, economy or effectiveness of Government operations or otherwise benefit the Government, except:

(1) Ideas that benefit employees such as holidays, leave, and insurance, or those involving services to employees such as working conditions, building and grounds, housekeeping, or routine safety practices generally are excluded from consideration unless there are also significant anticipated benefits to the Government from the idea.

(2) Submissions which are not constructive proposals offering specific means for improving operations or which contain assumptions or unsupported statements will not be accepted for consideration under the suggestion program.

b. Employee suggestions will be processed promptly, normally within 30 days of receipt.

c. Suggestions which are adopted locally but are believed to be useful elsewhere in VA or the Government will be forwarded to VACO for consideration for adoption on a wider scale.

d. Suggestions which cannot be evaluated or adopted locally because they are beyond the scope of local implementation will be forwarded to VACO, along with the facility's evaluation as to the merits or value of the idea.

e. Approval officials are responsible for implementing adopted suggestions and inventions and authorizing payment of cash awards as soon as possible.

f. Local employee recognition liaisons are responsible for circulating information on suggestions adopted for optional use to interested services/divisions and to their VACO awards' liaison.

g. All suggestions processed through the employee suggestion program have a 2-year award entitlement period during which, if the idea is subsequently adopted as a direct result of the employee's suggestion, or if any beneficial action traceable to the suggestion is taken, the suggestion should be reopened for award consideration.

h. Suggesters may request reconsideration of the decision on their suggestions.

i. Participation by employees in the suggestion program is voluntary.

j. Acceptance of a cash award for an employee suggestion or invention constitutes an agreement that the use of the idea, method or device for which the award was paid does not form the basis of a further claim against the Government by the employee. [For information on a further award, see para. 4c(3) of this part.]

2. SUGGESTION PROCEDURES

- a. Suggestions must be submitted in writing, using either VA Form 3951, Employee Suggestion, or a memorandum.
- b. Employees may submit suggestions directly to their servicing HRM office.
- c. Suggestions will be evaluated on VA Form 4239, Action on Employee Suggestion.
- d. Employee recognition liaisons will coordinate the review of employee suggestions originating from or forwarded to their organization for review and evaluation.

3. SUGGESTION AWARDS

- a. In order to qualify for a cash award, adopted suggestions must have measurable dollar benefits of at least \$250, or intangible benefits of comparable value, or a combination of both.
- b. Awards may be in the form of cash or time off. In determining the amount of the award for adopted suggestions, the appropriate scale of awards in part III, appendix A will be used.
- c. A cash award may be granted to an employee for an adopted suggestion which concerns matters within or outside job responsibilities.
- d. When warranted, a suggestion award may be supplemented based on benefits that are in addition to those realized by the original adoption of the suggestion.
- e. Once an award is accepted, the idea, method or device that was the subject of the suggestion becomes the exclusive property of the Government.
- f. Suggestion awards will be documented using VA Form 4239, and will contain a summary of the benefits resulting from adoption of the suggestion.

4. EMPLOYEE INVENTIONS

- a. An employee or group of employees whose invention benefits the government and/or the public may be considered for a cash or honorary award.
- b. VA regulations 38 CFR, sections 1.650 - 1.666, Inventions by Employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs, require that the inventor(s) disclose the invention to VA at the earliest possible time. The submission of the disclosure must contain specific information in a specific format. Contact the Office of General Counsel for additional information. An inventor's report should be submitted whether or not the employee considers the invention to be related or unrelated to his or her job. The Office of General Counsel will notify the appropriate officials of their obligation to consider employee inventors for awards.

c. Upon notification from the Office of General Counsel of the employee's eligibility for an award, the following may be recommended:

(1) An initial award of \$300 may be recommended and approved when the reported invention has been favorably evaluated by VA as having value to its mission.

(2) An additional award of \$500 should be granted when the following conditions are met:

(a) A patent application is filed by VA,

(b) The Federal government owns the invention or has a license to it, and

(c) Upon notification that a patent has been issued or has been allowed.

(3) A further award may be granted on inventions owned by the U.S. Government based on tangible or intangible benefits to the extent the invention has benefited the Government under the following conditions:

(a) When the invention benefits the public as evidenced by the number of patent licenses granted, reports on commercialization from patent licenses and other information pertaining to the commercial use of inventions; and/or

(b) When the invention provides benefits to the Government as evidenced by Government use.

d. Award recommendations will be submitted on VA Form 4659.

e. If an employee inventor believes the value of the invention to the Government or the public has substantially increased since an award was made, the employee may seek reconsideration of the award amount. The opinion and recommendations of the General Counsel may be sought on this issue.

APPENDIX A. EFFECTIVE SUGGESTION PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

1. THE BENEFITS OF AN EMPLOYEE SUGGESTION PROGRAM. While suggestions programs originally came about as a mechanism for saving money and resources by tapping into the creativity of employees, the benefits realized when an effective program is administered have gone well beyond saving money. Possibly the greatest benefit from a well-run suggestion program involves employee morale. With active and visible top management support, a suggestion program can greatly improve and enhance internal communications, employee involvement and employee empowerment, which are all desirable outcomes.

2. TIMELINESS. Critical to the suggestion program's success is the timeliness in which suggesters receive feedback on their idea. Typically, evaluations should be completed within 30 days of their receipt when local review is all that is necessary. An effective way to try to keep on top of processing these important employee ideas is to include suggestions as controlled correspondence as you send them out for evaluation. By doing so, you create a tracking record and deadline for follow-up and the suggestion won't get lost in the shuffle. If you are unable to meet the 30-day deadline for giving the suggester an evaluation, at least provide a note with a status report to keep the suggester informed. Conduct training sessions for individuals who regularly receive suggestions for evaluation. (Guidelines for evaluators appear at the end of this appendix.)

3. EFFECTIVE PROMOTION AND PUBLICITY. Give wide publicity to adopted ideas and use such publicity to encourage other employees to participate. Provide suggesters with tips to help them prepare their ideas. (Guidelines for employee suggesters appear later in this appendix.) Run special campaigns or contests to encourage employee participation and input. Provide general areas where specific solutions to problems are being sought and encourage employees to come up with solutions. Provide token items (such as a coffee mug or pen) to thank employees who participate by submitting a suggestion. Seek ideas through employee newsletters and bulletin boards.

4. CHANGING THE MINDSET. Suggestion programs often are viewed as just another "human resources" program and because of this view, often are given low priority on the list of things to do. Effective suggestion programs are run as an integral part of the day-to-day business of the organization and viewed in a positive manner as a "management efficiency" tool.

5. THE ROLE OF THE SUGGESTION EVALUATOR

a. Clearly the evaluator is a key player in the success of an employee suggestion program. It is important that an individual given responsibility to evaluate an employee idea have an open mind, be receptive to change, and be responsive to the employee making the suggestion. Lengthy delays in evaluating ideas, criticism of suggestions and employees making the suggestions has a negative effect on the program and reflects poorly on management.

**PART II
APPENDIX A**

b. Following are guidelines to consider in evaluating the idea:

(1) **Be Prompt.** Read the suggestion as quickly as possible to make sure that the suggestion is in the correct office for evaluation. If not, then immediately return the suggestion to the human resources management office for referral. If you are the appropriate evaluating official, try and prepare your response within a week. If an unusual delay in responding is needed due to testing or completion of a study, provide an interim response with a realistic projected completion date.

(2) **Be Receptive.** Look for ways to use the idea instead of reasons why the idea won't work. Keep an open mind.

(3) **Be Responsive.** In preparing your evaluation, make sure that you fully understand what the employee is suggesting and fully respond to the idea. If you don't understand, contact the employee directly or through the human resources management office. If you cannot adopt the idea, explain why and provide examples and written materials whenever possible to help the employee understand your decision.

(4) **Be Courteous.** As with any correspondence, put yourself in the position of receiving the evaluation and think about how you phrase your response. Even when you cannot provide a positive evaluation, phrase your response in a way to create good will and encourage the employee to continue being creative in his or her thinking.

6. PREPARING AN EMPLOYEE SUGGESTION

a. Statistics show that the most successful suggestions come from employees who work directly with the operations or procedures that the suggestion concerns. There is always room for improvement in doing your job so keep an open mind and try to think of ways to improve procedures and operations to make the best use of your time and of taxpayer's dollars.

b. When you do have an idea to improve operations, or a way to eliminate unnecessary paperwork or waste, write it down immediately. You may not develop it at that time, but by writing it down, you are less likely to forget about your idea.

c. When you are ready to develop your suggestion, here are a few steps to help you prepare your proposal to management.

(1) State the problem that currently exists, or the outdated procedure or situation that could be improved.

(2) Explain in as much detail as possible why the problem exists or the procedure adds no value (it may help to do a little research to see if others are having the same problem or if someone else has streamlined procedures in a similar manner), or how the situation could be changed to produce better results.

(3) State in specific terms how you feel the problem could be resolved or procedures modified in order to improve the efficiency or effectiveness of operations.

(4) Explain how your idea will benefit VA, the Government or the public and be as specific as possible (particularly if there are dollar savings you can identify).

d. After you have developed your idea, talk with your supervisor or human resources management office who might be able to further help you develop your suggestion.

e. Submit your idea as soon as possible in writing either using VA Form 3951 or a memorandum.

EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AND AWARDS

PART III. RECOGNIZING INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP CONTRIBUTIONS

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PART III. RECOGNIZING INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP CONTRIBUTIONS**1. SPECIAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

a. **General Provisions.** Recognition through a cash award, time off award or other honorary or non-monetary means may be granted to an individual employee, group or team of employees in recognition of a contribution, act, service or achievement that benefits VA/Federal Government. The type and amount of award will be based on the value of the contribution to the organization. In determining the amount of an award, the appropriate table(s) in appendix A of this part will be used. If a ceremony will be used to recognize award recipients, see VA Handbook 5017, Part IV, Appendix B.

NOTE: *Because recognition has its greatest impact as a motivational tool when it follows closely the contribution being recognized, every effort should be made by supervisors and managers to submit a recommendation as soon as possible after the contribution is made.*

(1) There is no limit on the number of special contribution awards that may be granted to an employee in any given period, either as an individual or as a member of a group or team. [Only the appropriate Under Secretary, or designee as outlined in Part I, Appendices B, C and D, or Assistant Secretary may approve special contribution awards that would cumulatively result in an employee receiving special contribution award monies that would exceed the total amount of the approving official's individual special contribution award authority during any fiscal year. For example, a VHA field facility director does not have final award approval for any employee to receive more than \$5,000 in the form of special contribution award(s) during any fiscal year. Any special contribution award recommendation that would result in the employee receiving money in excess of this amount during the fiscal year must be approved by the Under Secretary for Health. The cumulative amount described in this paragraph is for special contribution awards only. Other categories of awards, such as superior performance awards, suggestion awards, on-the-spot awards, productivity/gainsharing awards, etc., do not impact the cumulative dollar limit for special contribution awards.]

(2) When a special contribution award is based on a group contribution, each contributing employee, including supervisors, should share in the award. The award may be granted in equal shares or in shares which reflect actual demonstrated differences in contributions to the group effort.

(3) Some examples of contributions for which a special contribution award may be appropriate are:

(a) High-level performance on a special project while continuing to perform regular duties;

(b) Creative efforts that resulted in an important contribution to the efficiency or economy of VA operations or improved customer service such as streamlining processes or procedures or a significant reduction in paperwork;

(c) A major medical advancement;

- (d) Overcoming unusual, unique, or difficult circumstances in the performance of duties with exceptional results that warrant recognition;
- (e) Enhanced service delivery to customers through reengineering of work processes or procedures;
- (f) Significant improvements in the quality of services and products for VA customers; and
- (g) An act of heroism or unusual courage or competence in an emergency situation which was connected with or related to official employment;

NOTE: *See checklist in VA Handbook 5017, Part III, Appendix D for additional examples of contributions that may warrant a special contribution award.*

[(4)] Examples of situations where a monetary award is not appropriate, but an employee may be eligible for a time off award or other nonmonetary recognition, are included in [VA Handbook 5017, Part III, Appendix B].

[(5)] Generally, award recommendations will be submitted as soon as possible following the contribution. Cash and time off awards recommendations should be submitted using VA Form 4659, Incentive Awards Recommendation and Approval, and will contain a justification that summarizes the contribution and includes a description of the benefits to VA or beyond from the contribution which serve as the basis for the award. The justification may be completed on VA Form 4659a, Checklist for Special Contribution Award Recommendations, as an attachment to VA Form 4659, or on bond paper. Recommendations for special awards programs, such as "On-the-Spot" awards, may be submitted on alternative forms as indicated in the procedures for the special awards programs.

b. Types Of Awards for Special Contributions

(1) Special Contribution Awards of up to \$10,000 per employee to recognize individual, group or team efforts.

(2) On-the-Spot Awards provide immediate recognition of one-time, short-term efforts that do not meet the minimum requirements for a special contribution award. On-the-Spot Awards may be cash or nonmonetary or both.

(3) A Time Off Award is an excused absence granted to an employee without charge to leave or loss of pay. Time off may be used alone or in combination with other forms of special contribution awards. See appendix F of this part for additional information on time off awards.

(4) Non-monetary awards are discussed in [VA Handbook 5017, Part IV, paragraph 2].

2. SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE AWARDS. A superior performance award is a one-payment cash award that may be granted to an employee for sustained superior performance on job responsibilities over the period of a rating year. Managers should encourage and reward excellence in performance by granting these awards when appropriate to deserving employees. The factor used in identifying award recipients will be performance ratings.

a. Eligibility

(1) [All title 5, title 38, and title 38 hybrid employees, who are covered under VA's performance appraisal program or proficiency rating system are eligible to receive superior performance awards.]

(2) Superior performance awards are not required, but may be granted to [title 5, title 38 and title 38 hybrid] employees [who are covered by VA's performance appraisal system if a rating of fully successful/satisfactory or higher is achieved. A fully successful rating must include the attainment of an exceptional achievement level on at least one critical element to be eligible for an award.

(3) Title 38 employees who are covered by VA's proficiency report system may be considered for a superior performance award if a rating of satisfactory or higher is achieved.

(4) Recognition for superior performance may include a combination of both a QSI and cash award in accordance with Part I, paragraph 4 of this handbook.]

b. **Period of Performance.** This will coincide with the rating year.

c. **Amount of Superior Performance Award.** The dollar amount of the superior performance award will be determined by the performance rating attained [and must reflect meaningful distinctions based on levels of performance to ensure employees with higher ratings of record receive larger cash awards.

d. **Processing.** All cash awards issued as a result of an employee's annual performance rating under the performance appraisal program, including VHA's Executive Career Field Program, or proficiency report system, will be processed as a superior performance award under the provisions of this chapter. Generally, award recommendations will be submitted as soon as possible following the end of the rating cycle. Performance awards will be submitted using VA Form 4659, Incentive Awards Recommendation and Approval, with a complete copy of the employee's performance appraisal or proficiency report, and a narrative description of any factors that were considered but not described in the appraisal, e.g., the employee's self-assessment.

e.] **Appeal.** The failure to grant an employee a superior performance award or the amount of a superior performance award may not be appealed.

3. QUALITY STEP INCREASE (QSI). A quality step increase is an increase to an employee's rate of basic pay from one step of the grade to the next step that is granted in recognition of excellence in performance during the last appraisal cycle. The purpose of such increases is to recognize, on an individual basis, consistently high achievers by granting faster than normal step increases.

a. **Eligibility**

(1) Only General Schedule employees [appointed under title 5] are eligible to receive [QSIs].

(2) [Title 38 employees identified in 38 U.S.C. 7401 (with the exception of physicians and dentists) and title 38 hybrid employees in occupations identified in 38 U.S.C. 7401(3) are eligible for one-step Special Advancement for Performance in accordance with Part V, paragraph 6 of this handbook.

(3) [QSIs] are not required but may be granted to employees who receive an Outstanding rating of record.

[**NOTE:** *QSIs may only be granted at the grade level in which they are earned.*]

(4) QSIs are appropriate when an employee's sustained high level of achievement merits faster than normal advancement of basic pay and that employee is not in step 10 of the grade. A QSI not only

increases an employee’s base pay, but also increases the amount of retirement benefits, the amount of Government life insurance for covered employees, and often results in a higher basic pay adjustment upon promotion of the employee. Because a QSI represents an increase in base pay, this type of recognition may increase an organization’s budget well into the future.

[(5) Recognition for superior performance may include a combination of both a QSI and cash award in accordance with Part I, paragraph 4 of this handbook.]

NOTE: *Because a QSI represents an increase in base pay, this type of recognition may increase an organization’s budget well into the future.*

b. Submission. Recommendations for [QSIs] will be submitted as soon as possible after the end of the [performance rating] cycle on VA Form 4659. [A complete copy of the employee’s most recent performance appraisal, including specific examples of job performance justifying the performance rating level assigned, must be attached to VA Form 4659.] Standard Form 52, Request for Personnel Action, should also be provided to ensure timely processing.

c. Restrictions. A [QSI] may not be granted to an eligible employee who has received a [QSI] within the preceding 52 consecutive calendar weeks or who is in step 10 of the pay grade.

d. Effect on Regular Within-Grade Increases. An employee who receives a [QSI] does not start a new waiting period to meet the time requirements for a regular within-grade increase. If the increase places the employee in the *fourth or seventh step* of his or her pay grade, however, the waiting period for the within-grade increase is extended by 52 weeks. Because a QSI is intended to recognize and motivate an employee, the avenue most advantageous to the employee should be taken. Also, if the employee is about to be promoted, the QSI may or may not benefit the employee once promoted.

NOTE: *The following chart compares the impact of the effective date of a QSI on an employee’s progression from step 3 through step 5 of the grade. In the illustration, a decision was made to award a QSI to an employee who is due for a within-grade increase to step 4 in January 2004. The last two columns illustrate how making the QSI effective before or after the due date of the step 4 within-grade increase affects the due date for the within grade increase to step 5.*

Impact of QSI on Regular Within-Grade Increase		
<i>Regular Within-Grade (WGI) Progression</i>	<i>Impact of QSI</i>	<i>Impact When WGI Places Employee in Step 4 of Grade because QSI is delayed</i>
WGI to step 3 - effective 1/03	WGI to step 3 - effective 1/03	WGI to step 3 - effective 1/03
WGI to step 4 - effective 1/04	QSI to step 4 - effective 1/03	WGI to step 4 - effective 1/04
WGI to step 5 - effective 1/06	WGI to step 5 - effective 1/05	QSI to step 5 - effective 1/04*

**WGI and QSI may be processed on the same date as the WGI will always be effected first.*

e. **Effective Date.** [QSIs] should be made effective as soon as possible after they are approved unless a short delay would benefit the employee. Because the approval of the increase is a discretionary action, it may not be approved retroactively. However, if an administrative error occurred *after* the increase was approved that caused a delay in the increase being processed, it may be made effective retroactive to the first day of the first pay period following the date of approval.

4. PRODUCTIVITY SHARING OR GAINSHARING AWARDS. Productivity sharing or gainsharing programs are subject to the same award criteria that apply to other awards. These are awards that are paid out on a regular recurring basis in recognition of exceeding predetermined levels of productivity during the measurement period. Key officials may establish productivity sharing or

gainsharing programs to engage many or all employees in a common effort to achieve gains in productivity, quality or effectiveness and share some portion of the savings resulting from the gains to the employees or groups of employees who, through enhanced teamwork and common commitment, produce those results. Although such programs generally offer monetary incentives, they may also offer or be combined with time off or other forms of recognition.

NOTE: *In establishing a productivity sharing or gainsharing program, organizations are encouraged to involve employees in the design and administration of the program to obtain employee buy-in and support of the initiative.*

a. **Coverage.** Gainsharing programs may cover an entire organization, work units, teams or individual employees in specific occupations where output can be measured against preestablished goals.

b. **Defining Performance Measures.** Productivity, quality and/or effectiveness, whichever is being measured, should be defined in terms of resources used to produce measurable results. Compared with baseline data, these programs should include a predetermined method for measuring gains as well as for calculating the amount of any award based on the gain.

c. **Defining Measurement and Award Formulas.** The formulas developed to *determine gains* should generally be related to the nature of the work and the purpose for which the program was established. The formula developed to *calculate awards* based on gains should be related to a baseline standard to which a value is attached for each increment by which the standard is exceeded. For groups, the formula may also include the method for distributing the award among the employees who produced the gain. The award may be a uniform percentage of base pay, a set dollar amount, scale of time off, or other.

d. **Program Evaluation.** The results of a productivity sharing or gainsharing program should be monitored and evaluated periodically to ensure that the results achieved, and awards driven by them, are consistent with the intent of the program. Results of such reviews may signal the need to adjust standards that are consistently surpassed over time or are affected by new technology or work processes.

e. **Distribution of Awards.** Awards that result from these types of programs should be distributed as closely as possible after the gain has been realized. Awards may be paid on an annual, semi-annual, quarterly, monthly or biweekly basis or may be granted at other intervals based on the nature of the work and the type and size of the awards.

f. **Establishing Productivity Sharing or Gainsharing Programs.** Gainsharing programs should describe:

- (1) Objectives of the awards program (what the program is supposed to achieve);
- (2) Coverage (which employees, groups of employees, work units or occupations are covered by the program);
- (3) Types of outcomes that will be measured (improved productivity, quality, effectiveness);

(4) How the gains will be determined;

(5) Type of award that will be provided (flat amount cash award, cash award based on percent of base pay, time off, or other form of recognition);

(6) How awards will be calculated based on gains;

(7) Frequency for distributing the awards;

(8) How, where and/or when the awards will be presented; and

(9) Frequency and method of program evaluation.

5. ORGANIZATIONAL AWARDS PROGRAMS

a. Organizations are strongly encouraged to develop special awards programs to use along with other Departmental awards, to support specific organizational goals and objectives. These programs link most forms of recognition (monetary, non-monetary and time off) directly to the achievement of specifically defined organizational initiatives such as improved customer service, innovative practices, quality initiatives, elimination of unnecessary work processes or procedures, etc. These awards can also be used to recognize and reinforce organizationally defined values such as courtesy, employee empowerment, responsiveness to customers, risk taking, etc.

b. In planning and developing a special use awards program, involvement of [unions,] employees and supervisors at all levels is encouraged to create awareness and understanding of the program's goals and objectives, and to facilitate employee acceptance of the program. Employee input is also useful to ensure that the type of recognition being proposed is meaningful to employees and will serve as a motivator.

c. Special awards programs need to be described in writing and approved by a key official or his or her designee. The description of such programs should include:

(1) The objective of the awards program (what the program is supposed to achieve);

(2) The types of contributions that will be recognized (describe criteria and provide concrete examples whenever possible);

(3) The specific information that nominations must contain (a standardized nomination format will simplify the nomination, review and selection process);

(4) Who is eligible for an award (certain pay plans, occupations, work units, services/divisions, etc.);

(5) The type of recognition or award item that will be provided (to the extent possible recognition should be both meaningful to the employee and commensurate with the contribution recognized). Organizations may use existing certificates or design their own for use with special awards programs;

(6) The frequency and number of awards that will be granted and the award consideration period (monthly, quarterly, annually, on an as-warranted basis, etc.);

(7) The nomination, screening and approval processes (which should be kept to a minimum to encourage nominations while also ensuring that an accurate description of the contribution justifying the award is provided); and

(8) How, where and/or when the award(s) will be presented.

d. Information about special use awards programs should be announced and publicized to promote awareness among employees of the opportunity for recognition.

e. Many types of award programs are available to reduce costs and further organizational goals and objectives. Imaginative uses of awards which may be used include, but are not limited to awards that recognize:

(1) Employee of the Month, Quarter or Year;

(2) Teamwork and/or cooperation;

(3) Promoting the use of Best Practices;

(4) Promoting exceptional courtesy and responsiveness through written documents (letters, brochures, pamphlets, etc.);

(5) Improved work behaviors such as exemplary courtesy and responsiveness to veterans and the public;

(6) Recruitment efforts for referring candidates for hard-to-fill positions;

(7) Employee participation in the Employee Suggestion Program; and

(8) Suggestion Evaluators who provide prompt and responsive evaluations of employee suggestions.

f. To reinforce the effectiveness of special use awards, it is important to widely publicize the employees recognized under the program. The level at which awards are presented, as well as the involvement of the nominating and approving officials in the presentation of the award, are also important considerations. Newsletters, bulletin boards, articles in local newspapers, etc., can all serve as effective vehicles for the purpose of publicity.

g. To ensure that legal/regulatory requirements [and contractual obligations] are met, organizations should consult with local Human Resources Offices and Finance Offices and obtain necessary concurrences prior to implementation. Additionally, a copy of the approved special awards program should be maintained by the Human Resources Office as documentation for the program and to expedite processing of requests for recognition to support these programs.

h. Award justifications used to support granting any special awards may be submitted on VA Form 4659 or in accordance with the provisions of the program. Justifications must be maintained either by the organization's award liaison or the Human Resources office for a period of two years after the approval of the award.

i. Evaluation of each special use program should be conducted periodically to ensure its effectiveness and need for continuation. This review also provides an opportunity to make changes or reannounce the award program. How and when such evaluation will be carried out should be considered in the development of any special awards program.

APPENDIX A. AMOUNTS OF CASH AWARDS

1. The extent to which an employee or group of employees makes a contribution in support of VA's mission and the value of that contribution are the bases for granting a monetary award. Such awards are calculated using the appropriate table(s) on the next three pages.

a. Tangible benefits are specific monetary savings that can be calculated. When used as the basis for determining a cash award, tangible benefits are calculated based on an estimate of savings for the first full year. When there are significant nonrecurring costs involved in implementation, the amount of the award may be based on an *average* of the estimated net benefits over a period of up to 5 years.

b. Intangible benefits measure the value of a suggestion or contribution when [the] worth cannot be calculated in dollars, and considers such factors as value or significance of the contribution, and extent of application and impact. The values outlined on the following Scale of Awards Based on Intangible Benefits reflects the maximum amount that an individual employee may be given for a special contribution award based on the value of the benefit and the extent of the application. If a group special contribution award is given, no one employee may receive more than the amount reflected on the scale. Additionally, the amount of the award cannot exceed the amount delegated to the approving official or the award recommendation must be sent to a higher-level official for approval.

2. [During a fiscal year, no employee is authorized to receive individual or group special contribution awards that would result in an employee receiving a cumulative amount that exceeds the approving official's maximum dollar limit for an individual special contribution award, unless approved by the Under Secretary, or designee as outlined in Part I, Appendices B, C and D, or Assistant Secretary. The cumulative amount described in this paragraph is for special contribution awards only. Other categories of awards, such as superior performance awards, suggestion awards, on-the-spot awards, productivity/gainsharing awards, etc., do not impact the cumulative dollar limit for special contribution awards].

3. [The minimum cash award that may be granted under this program is \$50].

4. [A cash award granted under this program is a lump-sum award which is in addition to the regular pay of the recipient and is subject to the withholding of income and Medicare taxes].

5. [When a cash award is authorized for a group of employees based on a contribution or suggestion, each contributing employee may share in the award equally or in shares proportionate to each employee's participation in the contribution].

[6.] Exceptions to application of the scales of awards may be made as follows: (1) a properly calculated cash award for a group of employees may be increased by a reasonable amount if it would not provide a meaningful award (at least \$50 per employee) when divided among the recipients; or (2) a properly calculated cash award for an employee whose contribution falls directly within job requirements, but that is so outstanding that it warrants a cash award, may be reduced.

PART III
APPENDIX A

SCALE OF AWARDS BASED ON TANGIBLE BENEFITS

BENEFITS	AWARD	BENEFITS	AWARD	BENEFITS	AWARD	BENEFITS	AWARD	BENEFITS	AWARD
Up to \$10,000	10%*	50,000	2,200	90,000	3,400	170,000	4,050	1,800,000	12,200
11,000	1,030	51,000	2,230	91,000	3,430	175,000	4,075	1,900,000	12,700
12,000	1,060	52,000	2,260	92,000	3,460	180,000	4,100	2,000,000	13,200
13,000	1,090	53,000	2,290	93,000	3,490	185,000	4,125	2,100,000	13,700
14,000	1,120	54,000	2,320	94,000	3,520	190,000	4,150	2,200,000	14,200
15,000	1,150	55,000	2,350	95,000	3,550	195,000	4,175	2,300,000	14,700
16,000	1,180	56,000	2,380	96,000	3,580	200,000	4,200	2,400,000	15,200
17,000	1,210	57,000	2,410	97,000	3,610	225,000	4,325	2,500,000	15,700
18,000	1,240	58,000	2,440	98,000	3,640	250,000	4,450	2,600,000	16,200
19,000	1,270	59,000	2,470	99,000	3,670	275,000	4,575	2,700,000	16,700
20,000	1,300	60,000	2,500	100,000	3,700	300,000	4,700	2,800,000	17,200
21,000	1,330	61,000	2,530	101,000	3,705	325,000	4,825	2,900,000	17,700
22,000	1,360	62,000	2,560	102,000	3,710	350,000	4,950	3,000,000	18,200
23,000	1,390	63,000	2,590	103,000	3,715	375,000	5,075	3,100,000	18,700
24,000	1,420	64,000	2,620	104,000	3,720	400,000	5,200	3,200,000	19,200
25,000	1,450	65,000	2,650	105,000	3,725	425,000	5,325	3,300,000	19,700
26,000	1,480	66,000	2,680	106,000	3,730	450,000	5,450	3,400,000	20,200
27,000	1,510	67,000	2,710	107,000	3,735	475,000	5,575	3,500,000	20,700
28,000	1,540	68,000	2,740	108,000	3,740	500,000	5,700	3,600,000	21,200
29,000	1,570	69,000	2,770	109,000	3,745	550,000	5,950	3,700,000	21,700
30,000	1,600	70,000	2,800	110,000	3,750	600,000	6,200	3,800,000	22,200
31,000	1,630	71,000	2,830	111,000	3,755	650,000	6,450	3,900,000	22,700
32,000	1,660	72,000	2,860	112,000	3,760	700,000	6,700	4,000,000	23,200
33,000	1,690	73,000	2,890	113,000	3,765	750,000	6,950	4,100,000	23,700
34,000	1,720	74,000	2,920	114,000	3,770	800,000	7,200	4,200,000	24,200
35,000	1,750	75,000	2,950	115,000	3,775	850,000	7,450	4,300,000	24,700
36,000	1,780	76,000	2,980	116,000	3,780	900,000	7,700	4,360,000***	25,000
37,000	1,810	77,000	3,010	117,000	3,785	950,000	7,950		
38,000	1,840	78,000	3,040	118,000	3,790	1,000,000	8,200		
39,000	1,870	79,000	3,070	119,000	3,795	1,050,000	8,450		
40,000	1,900	80,000	3,100	120,000	3,800	1,100,000	8,700		
41,000	1,930	81,000	3,130	125,000	3,825	1,150,000	8,950		
42,000	1,960	82,000	3,160	130,000	3,850	1,200,000	9,200		
43,000	1,990	83,000	3,190	135,000	3,875	1,250,000	9,450		
44,000	2,020	84,000	3,220	140,000	3,900	1,300,000	9,700		
45,000	2,050	85,000	3,250	145,000	3,925	1,350,000	9,950		
46,000	2,080	86,000	3,280	150,000	3,950	1,400,000**	10,200		
47,000	2,110	87,000	3,310	155,000	3,975	1,500,000	10,700		
48,000	2,140	88,000	3,340	160,000	4,000	1,600,000	11,200		
49,000	2,170	89,000	3,370	165,000	4,025	1,700,000	11,700		

*Award is 10% of actual dollar value of benefit.

**Certain awards over \$10,000 require approval by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

***Maximum award authorized by OPM. The President may authorize up to an additional \$10,000.

[SCALE OF AWARDS BASED ON INTANGIBLE BENEFITS

VALUE OF BENEFIT	EXTENT OF APPLICATION		
	LOCAL	REGIONAL	GENERAL
	<p>Affects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one or more field facilities or Central Office organizational elements or staff office, or • a minor change or correction of a VA form , policy, or procedure, or • optional use of an idea or procedure, or • minor change in the area of technology or automation. 	<p>Affects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an entire network, region, or • all Central Office organizations, or • ideas approved for optional use in the Department or an administration, or • important area of technology or • automation. 	<p>Affects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more than one network, or region, • has impact VA-wide or beyond.
<p>MODERATE. Change or contribution to an operating principle, practice, procedure or program of limited impact or use.</p>	<p>Up to \$1,000</p>	<p>Up to \$3,000</p>	<p>Up to \$5,000</p>

EXTENT OF APPLICATION			
	LOCAL	REGIONAL	GENERAL
SUBSTANTIAL. Significant or important change, contribution to, or modification of an operating principle, practice, procedure or program or service to the public.	Up to \$3,000	Up to \$5,000	Up to \$7,500
EXCEPTIONAL. Complete revision or initiation of a major policy, practice or procedure that has significant impact on VA's mission. Major improvement in the quality of a critical product, activity, program or service to the public.	Up to \$5,000	Up to \$7,500	Up to \$10,000

NOTE: *\$50 is the minimum award that may be granted.*]

APPENDIX B. APPROPRIATE USES OF CASH AWARDS

<i>Appropriate</i>	<i>Inappropriate</i>
To Recognize:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ a significant contribution involving completion of a difficult project or assignment of importance to the mission of VA ◆ completion of a specific assignment or project in advance of an established deadline and/or with favorable results ◆ unusual initiative, innovation or creativity in completion of work assignments resulting in improved operations or services ◆ unusual courtesy or responsiveness to customers which clearly demonstrates performance beyond the call of duty and reflects favorably on the organization and VA ◆ performance (without compensation of any nature) of additional duties over an extended period of time during the absence of another staff member ◆ an employee suggestion beyond the normal scope of the job which results in benefits to VA or the Government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ perceived discrepancies in VA's pay system ◆ as a farewell gift ◆ to recognize good attendance ◆ to recognize judicious use of sick leave ◆ to recognize performance of additional duties where a temporary promotion was given ◆ to recognize additional hours of work when overtime pay or compensatory time was provided for those additional hours ◆ as an "incentive" to encourage employees to work in a particular area or on a particular shift ◆ as an "incentive" to retire ◆ to recognize efforts in connection with voluntary participation as a canvasser for the Combined Federal Campaign, Savings Bonds, Blood Drives, etc.

APPENDIX C. SPECIAL AWARDS PROGRAMS

The use of special awards programs to support organizational goals and objectives, promote teamwork and emphasize organizational values is strongly encouraged. Tremendous flexibility exists within VA’s Employee recognition Program to develop and tailor such programs to both meet the needs of employees and the organization. For specific information on establishing special organizational awards programs, consult part III, paragraph 4, and part IV, paragraphs 1b and 2.

Following are some examples of awards programs, including criteria, frequency and types of recognition. These programs can be used to promote teamwork, peer recognition and support good customer relations by permitting peer nomination and nomination by individuals outside of the organization. The options for the types of contributions, who is eligible to receive, who can nominate and form of recognition are many and varied. For example, an entire awards program has been developed using the Olympic Theme, with specially-designed medals for recipients of the top honors.

Example 1

Theme: Employee of the Month/Employee of the Quarter/Year

Criteria: Outstanding employee efforts during the specified period as evidenced by peers, customers, management, etc.

Type of Recognition: Cash, time off, non-monetary item or any combination of these forms of recognition.

Example 2

Theme: Extra Mile, Pointing the Way, Setting the Tone, Customer Service Club, Extra Touch

Criteria: Employees who consistently go above and beyond in serving customers, who display leadership or exemplary teamwork in serving the public.

Type of Recognition: Cash, time off, non-monetary item or any combination of these forms of recognition.

Example 3

Theme: Extra Touch Award, Heart of Gold, Pride in People, Sunshine Award, Impact Award, Helping Hands Award

Criteria: Recognize exceptional courtesy and responsiveness, positive and friendly attitude, willingness to pitch in and help others.

Type of Recognition: Cash, time off, non-monetary item or any combination of these forms of recognition.

SPECIAL AWARDS PROGRAMS (CONTINUED)

Example 4

Theme: Teamwork

Criteria: Exemplary teamwork and results as evidenced by customer feedback, meeting and exceeding organizational goals and objectives through effective team interaction and cooperation, or supporting and demonstrating organizational values.

Type of Recognition: Cash, time off, non-monetary item or any combination of these forms of recognition.

In addition to the above examples, special programs can be established to emphasize and recognize individuals or groups who promote and enhance organizational and national goals such as equal opportunity, cost-savings, quality improvement, and paperwork reduction. **Non-monetary recognition in the form of certificates and pins only** may also be used to recognize employees for dependability through conservation of sick leave during specific periods or for those who maintain large balances of sick leave.

APPENDIX D. PREPARING AWARD JUSTIFICATIONS/NOMINATIONS

1. SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION AWARD (SCA)

a. Special Contribution Award is used to recognize an act, service, or achievement **exceeding normal job expectations** by an employee or group of employees. For this reason, the justification should not read like a statement of duties but should describe a specific contribution to the organization or the Department and the benefits of that contribution to VA.

b. Although the process of determining the dollar amount of a SCA is somewhat subjective unless there are measurable (tangible) dollars to cite, there are some general guidelines to follow to help ensure that the special contribution is properly justified and the expenditure of appropriated funds is warranted.

c. Typically, a well-written justification should take only four or five paragraphs and be limited to under one page. Following are some guidelines for formatting and content of those paragraphs:

(1) The first paragraph should serve as an introduction by stating the name of the employee, team, or group being recommended for the award, the award amount and summarizing (one or two sentences) the contribution being recognized. For example, "I am pleased to recommend Mary Smith for a special contribution award of \$500. Ms. Smith is being recognized for ..."

(2) The second paragraph should provide a more detailed description of the contribution including what the employee did, any significant requirements or constraints involving the contribution, and any obstacles the employee had to overcome in order to make the contribution. This information should be described in context of the impact on the organization, VA or the Nation. For example, streamlined procedures to improve nationwide quality and timeliness of veterans claims processing, new procedures to reduce or eliminate patient waiting time at the local facility.

(3) The third paragraph should describe how the benefits identified in the preceding paragraph were determined and, consequently, how the award was calculated. For example, using the scale of awards based on intangible benefits, identify the extent of the value of the contribution "local, regional or general" and the value of the contribution. Does the contribution being recognized represent a minor change with limited impact or an exceptional change affecting a large part of VA and its mission?

(4) The fourth paragraph should simply summarize the recommendation and bring it to closure.

d. For Special Contributions, the checklist appearing at the end of this appendix (VA Form 4659a) may be attached to VA Form 4659 and serve as the justification.

2. GUIDE TO PREPARING HONOR AND EXTERNAL AWARDS NOMINATIONS

a. A key to ensuring that Department nominees receive full and fair consideration in award competitions, both internal and external, is a well-written nomination that is easy-to-understand. Even the most noteworthy achievements may go unnoticed by an award selection committee if the nomination is not skillfully presented. Additionally, some sponsors require specific information in a

PART III

APPENDIX D

specific format and will not consider nominations, regardless of how great the contributions are, if nominating procedures are not followed. Because there is often a very short time frame in which to respond to the sponsor's request for nominations, there is often no time to go back to the nominating official to correct nominations or obtain additional information. In such cases where the nomination is incomplete or errors are present, the nomination may not be considered by the Department due to the deadline. Common errors include typographical errors and use of acronyms that are not defined at all or when first used.

b. The following is intended to serve as a checklist by individuals preparing award nominations for Departmental and external awards programs to help ensure that the nomination is prepared in such a way as to receive the greatest consideration. The checklist is divided into two areas: General Information and Substantive Information.

3. GENERAL INFORMATION

a. Have the award announcement, criteria, and requirements been thoroughly reviewed and is there a clear understanding of the type of contribution that the award sponsor is seeking?

b. Is the person assigned to develop the nomination a skilled writer?

c. If not, has someone been assigned to edit the nomination to ensure quality/accuracy?

d. Is the nomination in the proper format?

e. Has all requested information been provided in the appropriate order?

f. Is the nomination free of typographical, grammatical and punctuation errors?

g. Have all acronyms used in the package been defined the first time they are used?

h. Have you avoided abbreviations which might not be familiar to all reviewers?

i. Does the package present an overall neat appearance?

j. Have signatures, endorsement letters, references, person to contact for further information, pictures of nominees, or other similar items been provided when required?

k. Have nominees signed the release of information form?

l. Have the appropriate number of copies been forwarded?

m. Has a top level official (facility Director, Associate Director or Chief of Staff) reviewed the nomination package before forwarding it to Central Office?

4. SUBSTANTIVE INFORMATION

- a. Has all relevant information to support the nomination been gathered? (Statistics, relevant information from veterans, veterans groups or community leaders, newspaper clippings or other publicity, etc.)
- b. Once gathered, has supporting documentation been analyzed to select for use that which is most relevant to the award criteria and overall purpose of the award?
- c. Has maximum use been made of the information which highlights VA's mission of quality and compassionate service to the Nation's veterans and their beneficiaries? (Particularly effective in award programs stressing service to the public.)
- d. Have general statements been addressed by specific facts and achievements? (It is not sufficient to say that someone has been an effective administrator, manager, public servant, etc. Support such statements with facts and examples that support such statements.)
- e. Has the scope of the nominee's achievements been adequately portrayed? (The achievements of many VA employees go far beyond the local level, e.g., achievements may be significant throughout an occupational group or profession on a nationwide basis or have impact not only on the total veteran population but on other major segments of the Nation's or world's population.)
- f. Have dollar figures, workload figures, or other relevant statistics been used? (Statistics are particularly effective for award programs which recognize use of managerial skills resulting in savings, increased productivity or efficiency levels, cost avoidance, etc.)
- g. When appropriate, does the nomination adequately portray the direct influences/effects (e.g., saving lives, relieving pain, caring for the disabled, assisting a grieving family, etc.) the nominee and his/her achievements may have had on real people (veterans, their families, beneficiaries, members of the local community, etc.)?
- h. When appropriate, has the nominee's activities outside the Department of Veterans Affairs been properly emphasized (e.g., volunteer work, public speaking, community involvement, publications, as appropriate)?
- i. Is the narrative portion of the nomination clear and concise, does it flow smoothly, and is it of an appropriate length? (Many award programs specify the length of narrative justifications. For those that do not, it is best to limit the narrative to the 2-4 page range. More does not necessarily mean better.)

 Department of Veterans Affairs		AWARD JUSTIFICATION
INSTRUCTIONS: Use this form to provide the justification for awards as an attachment to VA Form 4659, Recognition of High Level Performance. Check the applicable type(s) of contribution in the first column and briefly describe the accomplishment in the corresponding box in the second column. The narrative statement should clearly describe the specific accomplishment and not merely paraphrase the type of contribution listed in the first column. Include the information regarding the benefit of the contribution to the organization. See example below:		
TYPE OF CONTRIBUTION	CITE SPECIFIC EXAMPLE OF EMPLOYEE'S (GROUP'S) EFFORT	
Automation, modification or reengineering of work process, practices or procedures	The A team developed an automated system for submission and tracking of xyz work orders. This decreased the average time to deliver the service to our customers from 5 to 3 days.	
CHECKLIST FOR SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION AWARD RECOMMENDATIONS		
TYPE OF CONTRIBUTION	CITE SPECIFIC EXAMPLE OF EMPLOYEE'S (GROUP'S) EFFORT	
<input type="checkbox"/> Unusual Initiative		
<input type="checkbox"/> Creativity an/or innovation in solving a problem or establishing a new procedure or practice		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unusual effort in completion of assignment, task, or project	Due to extended absence of a coworker, Ms. Smith provided double coverage from March 13 through April 12, performing the essential duties of both jobs in an exemplary manner.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Unexpected benefits (<i>either tangible or intangible</i>) to the organization or beyond from employee's efforts		
<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstration of a high level skill and ability in completion of assignment or task		
<input type="checkbox"/> Demonstration of exceptional teamwork or teambuilding		
<input type="checkbox"/> Exceptional courtesy or responsiveness to a customer		
<input type="checkbox"/> Preparation of exceptional written materials		
<input type="checkbox"/> Automation, modification or reengineering of work processes, practices or procedures		
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (<i>describe</i>)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (<i>describe</i>)		
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS: 		

APPENDIX E. DECISIONS RELATED TO AWARDS AND NECESSARY RECOGNITION EXPENSES

IDENTIFIER	DATE	TOPIC	SUMMARY
B-241987 70 Comp. Gen. 440	4/91	Necessary Expenses (<i>Per Diem</i>)	Pursuant to the Government Employees Incentive Awards Act, Agency heads have discretion to issue travel orders and pay the travel expenses of the spouse of an employee award recipient to attend the awards ceremony. The travel authorizing official has broad discretionary authority under OPM guidance to establish the amount of per diem and the point of travel departure and return.
B-236040 70 Comp. Gen. 16	10/90	Necessary Expenses (<i>Award Banquet Fees</i>)	Permits an agency, under certain circumstances, to pay fees for its employees to attend local banquets where they have been nominated by their agency to receive an award from an interagency coordinating group.
69 Comp. Gen. 38 (B-233607)	8/89	Necessary Expenses (<i>Travel for winner and guest</i>)	Permits an agency head to pay travel expenses for an employee and an employee's guest if his or her presence would further the purposes of the awards program.
66 Comp. Gen. 536 (B-223895)	6/87	Necessary Expenses (<i>Refreshments at ceremonies</i>)	Permits agency expenditures for refreshments at a ceremony conducted under the authority of the Government Employees' Incentive Awards Act as a "necessary expense."
65 Comp Gen. 738 (B-223319)	7/86	Necessary Expenses (<i>Refreshments at ceremonies</i>)	Permits an agency head to provide for <i>light refreshments</i> in connection with a ceremony honoring Federal employees under the Government Employees Incentive Awards Act, and permits payments for such expenditures from appropriated funds. See also B-271511 (March 4, 1997), approving the use of appropriated funds to purchase food or food vouchers for use as nonmonetary award under the Government Employees Incentive Awards Act.
55 Comp. Gen. 800 (B-166802)	2/76	Necessary Expenses (<i>Travel of attendant for disabled employee receiving award</i>)	Permits an agency to pay for the travel of an attendant for a disabled employee requiring an attendant who must travel to receive an award provided the employee otherwise was unable to attend the ceremony.
B-111642	5/57	Necessary Expenses (<i>Travel for surviving spouse to receive award</i>)	Permits an agency to pay travel expenses for a surviving spouse to attend an awards ceremony and receive an award posthumously for a contribution made by the decedent.

DECISIONS RELATED TO AWARDS AND NECESSARY RECOGNITION EXPENSES (CONTINUED)

IDENTIFIER	DATE	TOPIC	SUMMARY
B-172556	12/71	Entry Fees (<i>Contests</i>)	Held that payment of a contest entry fee may be permissible where the prize is awarded to the agency and not to the individual and where there is sufficient justification that the expense will further the objects of the appropriation. The use of appropriated funds to enter other contests would depend upon the nature of the contest, the nature of the prizes and to whom they are awarded, and on the agency's justification that the expenses are necessarily incurred to carry out agency functions. NOTE: This case involved a general appropriation question. The Government Employees Incentive Awards Act was NOT the basis for the approving this appropriation. <u>See also</u> B-247563.3 (April 5, 1996), where the Comptroller General denied a VA expenditure to enter a contest involving a competitive fitness event where the event was deemed to be a personal activity.
B-256399	6/94	Award Items	Permits the purchase, as a form of recognition under the awards program, of items such as tickets to local sporting events or local amusement parks. See also B-271511 (March 4, 1997) permitting the use of meals or food vouchers as informal recognition awards.
B-243025	5/91	Necessary Expenses (<i>Non-Monetary Awards-Jackets</i>)	Permits the FAA to procure 100 jackets at a cost of \$50 each to be presented as honorary awards finding that agencies have the authority to procure items at nominal cost to be used as honorary awards under the Incentive Awards Act.
67 Comp. Gen. (B-227559)	3/88	Necessary Expenses (<i>Non-Monetary Awards - #1 Telephones</i>)	Permits the Defense Depot to purchase telephones in the shape of a number "1" for use as career service or honorary awards, but does not permit their use as awards for employees' reduced usage of sick leave.

DECISIONS RELATED TO AWARDS AND NECESSARY RECOGNITION EXPENSES (CONTINUED)

IDENTIFIER	DATE	TOPIC	SUMMARY
B-230062	12/88	Necessary Expenses (<i>Non-Monetary Awards-posters</i>)	Permits the Army to purchase framed posters as "prizes" for winners of drawings held at national conventions of student organizations attended by the Army. The expenditure was allowed because the purpose of the prize was to collect names to further the recruiting efforts, a specific mission for which funds were appropriated. NOTE: This case involved a general appropriation question. The Government Employees Incentive Awards Act was NOT the basis for approving this appropriation. <u>But see</u> B-247563.3 (April 5, 1996), where the Comptroller General denied VA recruitment expenditures for items such as shoelaces, pens and scissors that contained the VA logo.
46 Comp. Gen. 662 (B-160464)	2/67	Non-monetary Only for Career Service Recognition	Authorizes honorary recognition for career service and retirement, but does not authorize cash awards based solely on length of service or retirement.

APPENDIX F. TIME OFF AWARDS

1. GENERAL PROVISIONS

a. Time off awards may be granted to an individual or group of employees for contributions that benefit the Department.

b. The amount of a time off award is subject to the following:

(1) The minimum time off award is 4 hours, except for VHA full-time title 38 employees paid on a daily basis, who may only be granted time off in increments of 1 day (8 hours equivalent).

(2) Time off awards will be granted in increments of 1 hour.

(3) Not more than 40 hours may be granted to an employee for a specific contribution.

(4) The maximum amount of time off that may be granted to any employee during a 12 month period is 80 hours.

(5) Time off must be used by the employee in increments of 1 hour, except that VHA full-time title 38 employees paid on a daily basis must use in 1-day increments.

c. [] [E]ach time off award must be used within [365] days after the date on which it was approved. []. Failure to use an award within [365 days after the date of approval] will result in the employee[']s forfeiture of any unused portion of the award. [To avoid possible forfeiture, management should allow the employee time to utilize the award within the prescribed timeframe.]

d. Time off awards may be transferred when an employee changes jobs or organizations within VA. Time off awards may not be transferred to another Federal agency if an employee leaves VA and, likewise, time off will be forfeited upon an employee's separation from VA and may not be treated as annual leave for lump sum payment purposes. Time off may not be recredited to a former employee if reemployed by VA.

e. Time off awards may not, under any circumstances, be converted to a cash payment, to an employee or group of employees.

2. COVERAGE. Except as provided in VA Handbook 5017, Part III, paragraph 3, employees who earn leave under the provisions of 5 U.S.C., chapter 63 or 38 U.S.C., chapter 74 and VA Handbook 5011, Hours of Duty and Leave.

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APPENDIX F**

3. EXCLUSIONS. Employees in the Senior Executive Service and equivalents appointed under title 5 or title 38.

4. DETERMINING TIME OFF AWARDS

a. Time off awards may be used in conjunction with special use award programs. The time off award may be granted in addition to any monetary or honorary award already provided for in the design of the program. [T]ime off may be [combined with other awards in accordance with Part I, para. 4 of this handbook].

b. When using time off to supplement a cash award, care should be taken to ensure that total recognition is commensurate with the contribution.

c. In determining the amount of time off to grant in recognition of a single contribution or for sustained high-level achievement, use the scale at the end of this appendix.

5. ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

a. To the extent possible, management should ensure that time off granted as an incentive is used promptly both to reinforce the motivational value of this form of recognition and to ensure that the employee does not have to forfeit his or her time off award.

b. In granting this form of recognition, management should weigh organizational priorities to ensure that the employee will have an opportunity to use the number of hours of time off being awarded within the period available for its use.

6. SCHEDULING, RECORDING AND ACCOUNTING FOR TIME OFF

a. Although time off is not a category of leave, current procedures for requesting and scheduling use of discretionary leave (i.e., annual leave, leave without pay) will apply to time off awards. At a minimum, employees must request time off and obtain supervisory approval for absence in advance of its use. Action on each request will be made in consideration of factors which are normally considered in granting discretionary leave.

b. Each time off award granted must be recorded and tracked separately to ensure use by its expiration date. Under the direction of supervisors, timekeepers will be responsible for tracking time off accumulated and used as a subsidiary record to the electronic timecard for employees in their organization in accordance with instructions in MP-6, part V, supplement 2.2.

c. Upon [reassignment] of a VA employee to another VA facility, supervisors will be responsible for ensuring that information on any unused time off balance is provided to the servicing human resources management office for recording on VA Form 3918, Intra-agency Transfer Request, in the "Remarks" section. The amount(s) of unused time off and respective expiration date(s) must be annotated. Human Resources Management officials at the gaining facility must ensure this information is provided to the new supervisor who, in turn, will ensure the appropriate timekeeper is provided this information for recordkeeping purposes. Since time off awards have a specific expiration date, expedited transfer of this information is essential.

SCALE OF TIME OFF AWARDS

VALUE TO ORGANIZATION	NUMBER OF HOURS
MODERATE Change or contribution to an operating principle, practice, procedure or program of limited impact or use.	Up to 12
SUBSTANTIAL Significant or important change, contribution to or modification of an operating principle, practice, procedure or program or service to the public.	Up to 24
EXCEPTIONAL Complete revision or initiation of a major policy, practice or procedure that has significant impact on VA's mission. Major improvement in the quality of a critical product, activity, program or service to the public.	Up to 40

EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AND AWARDS

PART IV. HONOR AND NON-MONETARY AWARDS

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PART IV. HONOR AND NON-MONETARY AWARDS.

1. VA HONOR AWARDS. These awards include a suitably inscribed certificate, plaque, desk or office item or other similar item that has an honor connotation. Honorary awards are an integral part of the Department's recognition and awards program and are available in a variety of forms to recognize a wide range of one-time or career achievements. As with other forms of recognition, these awards can also be used to support the achievement of organizational goals and objectives and should be incorporated as much as possible into organizational awards programs. The costs associated with granting these awards can be minimal and, depending on the level of approval and presentation as well as the method of presentation, their value as a motivator can be significant. Honor awards are distinguished from non-monetary awards by the criteria, level of the official approving and presenting the award and the few numbers of these awards granted. [] (See appendix A of this part and appendix C of part III for information on traditional honor awards and other creative honor awards that have been used.)

a. Secretary's Honor Awards Program

(1) The Secretary approves and personally presents a number of awards to employees or groups of employees in recognition of exceptional efforts that support VA's mission, distinguished VA or Federal careers, outstanding community service and for acts of heroism. A listing of these awards, along with criteria and nominating procedures, appears in appendix A of this part. In addition to awards that recognize VA employees, the Secretary also recognizes contributions by private citizens or private organizations who make contributions in support of VA's mission.

(2) Awards Liaisons will prepare VA Form 50-1, Request for Security Clearance, on all employees in their organization being recommended for an award by the Secretary. In unique or unusual circumstances, a request to waive this requirement with appropriate justification may be made to the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration.

b. Organizational Honor Awards Programs. Key VA officials are strongly encouraged to establish honor awards programs to supplement those granted by the Secretary which primarily focus on significant contributions to the goals and objectives of their organization. A listing of some of these awards, along with criteria, appears in appendix A of this part.

c. Service Recognition

(1) **Length of Service.** While not technically an award because an employee need not perform above job requirements to be recognized, service recognition is an accepted part of VA's employee recognition and awards program. Service pins and certificates are available starting with 10 years of service through 50 years at 5-year intervals and should be presented as close as possible to the employee's anniversary date.

NOTE: *Service Awards at 50 years or above are from the Secretary. (See appendix A of this part for information on processing service awards for 50, 55, 60 and 65 years of service.)*

(2) **Approving Officials**

(a) Key officials are authorized to present other non-monetary items, particularly for service of 30 years or more, in addition to the VA-wide pins and certificates.

NOTE: *Cost implications of providing such items should be considered, particularly for the lower years when a large number of employees will reach these milestones.*

(b) Key officials will sign service award certificates or may redelegate this authority to a lower level.

(3) **Service Computation.** Credit is given for all Federal service, both creditable military and civilian. The length of service is based on the employee's service computation date except for retired members of the uniformed services.

(4) **Recognition at the Time of Retirement.** Since awards are intended to not only recognize employees for their special efforts, but are intended to motivate the recipient and others who witness the presentation, generally it is inappropriate to reward employees monetarily when they leave VA service either through retirement or separation. It may be fitting and appropriate to consider awarding some form of honor or nonmonetary award in recognition of their dedicated efforts to support VA's mission. Several options are available to recognize an employee leaving VA. The type of recognition chosen and the level at which it is approved should correspond to the scope and importance of career achievements and/or the level of dedication and exceptional service to VA.

(a) **Retirement Certificate (and matching pin).** The retirement certificate can be given to any employee leaving VA service through retirement. The retirement pin may also be given.

(b) **Certificate of Commendation.** A certificate, bearing a personalized citation and signed by a key official for significant contributions to an organization or the Department.

(c) **Outstanding Career Award.** A certificate with generic citation which recognizes outstanding accomplishments either within or outside normal job requirements over a prolonged period of time.

(d) **Exemplary Service Award (formerly Honor Award).** A certificate, bearing a personalized citation and signed by the head of an organization, presented for contributions of major significance to an organization or the Department. Typically, if given at retirement, the award recognizes exceptional career contributions.

(e) **Distinguished Career Award.** A certificate, bearing a generic citation, suitably framed[, and an appropriate recognition item, if applicable.] This award recognizes an individual who has made significant contributions that have VA-wide or national impact. [If a recognition item (e.g., medal, lapel pin, etc.) is given, it should be commensurate with the level of the employee's contribution.]

d. **Documentation.** Unless otherwise indicated, recommendations for Honor Awards are submitted on VA Form 4659.

2. NON-MONETARY AWARDS

a. **Non-monetary Awards.** Non-monetary awards are becoming one of the more popular types of incentives used in VA for a number of reasons. The nominal cost (generally up to \$50) of such items in an era of declining budgets and limits on spending, the ability to have such items on hand to be used to immediately recognize an employee or team efforts, and the variety of items that can be used that provide a unique and different incentive for employees. Such incentives, when used to immediately reinforce an employee contribution of limited impact and value, can be as, if not more, effective than cash in motivating an employee or group of employees.

b. **Non-monetary Versus Honor Awards.** Although these forms of recognition may overlap (a certificate can be both an honor award and a non-monetary award), these forms of recognition are distinguished generally by the level of contribution required and level at which they are approved and presented. Typically honor awards recognize exceptional contributions of great importance to the Department. As with any form of recognition used, the recommending official should try to ensure that the recognition being suggested both fits the contribution and the employee(s) being recognized. For example, a non-monetary award item would be inappropriate to recognize a significant contribution such as a medical breakthrough but might be appropriate to give someone to thank them for completing a rush assignment.

c. **Types of Non-monetary Awards.** A full range of items from a certificate of appreciation, to a gift certificate to a favorite restaurant, to an item the employee can wear such as a T-shirt, jacket or scarf to an appropriate desk item such as a calculator, pen, clock, radio, etc. are available using appropriated funds. These items can only be procured when used in connection with a formally established award program or to be used in connection with recognition. Such use must be documented in writing when ordering. (See appendices C and E of part III for examples of non-monetary incentives used with special awards programs and decisions on the appropriateness of such items.)

[d. **Tax Liability of Non-monetary Awards.** When presenting a non-monetary award to an employee, consideration will be given to the impact and possible tax liability to the employee. Some non-monetary awards may be non-taxable if they are considered *de minimis* in value. In determining whether an item is *de minimis*, the value of the item (so small that accounting for the item is unreasonable or impractical) and the frequency with which it is given (how often similar items are provided to employees) will be considered. The maximum value will not exceed \$100 when considering the *de minimis* value.

(1) Cash equivalent awards (e.g., gift cards, gift certificates, and savings bonds) are always taxable and cannot be considered *de minimis*.

(2) Length of Service and Safety Achievement Awards are not taxable in most cases. These awards must be tangible personal property (not cash, gift cards, gift certificates, or savings bonds), and awarded as part of a meaningful presentation. The annual excludable tax amount for a length of service or safety achievement award is defined in Office of Financial Policy, Volume II, Chapter 4.

(3) If a non-monetary award is determined to be taxable to the employee, it is the responsibility of the award approving official to determine the fair market value (FMV) for tax purposes. The FMV may be the purchase price of the item, but the FMV will be determined based on all of the facts and circumstances. The approving official may choose and has the final decision to “gross-up” taxable non-

monetary awards in order to cover the employee's taxes on the award. When an award amount is "grossed-up" to cover the taxes, both the value of the award and the taxes must be included in the employee's gross wages. The approving official will complete the certification on VA Form 4659, Incentive Awards Recommendation and Approval. The "Special Use" section must be completed and certified by the approving official.

e.] **Inappropriate Uses.** Items purchased under the authority of VA's employee recognition program may not be given away randomly, but must be used as recognition for an employee's or group's efforts. For example, items with no intrinsic value such as buttons and magnets handed out in connection with public service recognition week, or nurses week or for a historical event like the 50th anniversary of the signing of the GI Bill are not considered awards under VA's employee recognition programs but are considered mementos as there is no linkage between the item being handed out and a special act, service or achievement by the employee. For further information on the appropriateness of mementos, consult guidance issued by the Office of Financial Policy.

3. EXTERNALLY SPONSORED AWARDS

a. The Department is invited to participate in a number of externally sponsored honor awards programs which offer the opportunity to further recognize the achievements of VA employees. Appendix A of this part contains a list of a number of external awards programs in which VA has traditionally participated. In addition, there are many local or regional awards programs announced each year in which field facilities may participate. Officials should explore every opportunity to recognize the exceptional achievements of VA employees and publicize their efforts both within VA and beyond.

b. A Release of Information Statement is requested to be signed by each employee nominated for an external honor award. This statement, once signed, gives VA the right to disclose the contents of the nomination to other sources, as requested, for the purpose of publicity. The personal privacy of an employee who declines the release of such information should be safeguarded.

c. Awards Liaisons will prepare VA Form 50-1 on all employees being recommended by their organization for an external award that is approved by the Secretary. In unique or unusual circumstances, a request to waive this requirement with appropriate justification may be made to the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration.

APPENDIX A. HONOR AWARDS GUIDE

This appendix provides information regarding the following honor awards:

1. Secretary's honor awards
2. Internal and external honor awards
3. Organizational awards
4. Service awards from the Secretary (50, 55, 60, + 65 years of service)

1. SECRETARY’S HONOR AWARDS*

Type of Award	Eligibility	Criteria	Form of Award	Due Date
Exceptional Service Award	Any VA employee or group of VA employees	In recognition of outstanding contributions of major significance to VA, the Federal Government or the Nation, including exceptional leadership, skill or ability in administration of a major program, extraordinary initiative or creativity in the development of a major improvement; exceptionally successful use of human resources as evidenced through high workforce productivity, a major contribution to science and technology, an exceptional contribution in the public interest related to official employment or exceptional accomplishment significantly contributing to VA’s mission. NOTE: <i>Award is not to be used as a retirement or farewell award unless cumulative career achievements warrant this high level of recognition.</i>	[] Citation signed by the Secretary and framed. [An appropriate recognition item may also be provided, such as a lapel pin, medal, etc.] When granted to a group, the group will receive one award and no [additional recognition item] will be provided.	At any time a contribution meeting criteria has been made. Nominees for this award could have received Meritorious Service Award.
Meritorious Service Award	Any VA employee or group of VA employees	Granted in recognition of significant contributions to the Department that approach but do not meet the standards for the Exceptional Service Award. Typically these awards are used as a stepping stone to receipt of VA’s highest honor, the Exceptional Service Award.	[] Citation signed by the Secretary and framed. [An appropriate recognition item may also be provided, such as a lapel pin, medal, etc.] When granted to a group, the group will receive one award and no [additional recognition item] will be provided.	At any time a contribution meeting criteria is made.
Distinguished Career Award	Any VA employee who is retiring or departing VA	This is the highest award that can be given to an employee leaving the Department and recognizes cumulative achievements of an employee who has rendered truly distinguished service throughout a VA career. It may be granted for accomplishments over a prolonged period involving the exercise of authority or judgment in the public interest and in advancement of VA’s mission or for professional, scientific, or administrative achievement that received widespread recognition both within and outside of VA. Nomination should cite tangible evidence of employee’s contributions to VA. It is expected that individuals nominated for this award will have received other recognition during their career.	[] Citation signed by the Secretary and framed. [An appropriate recognition item may also be provided, such as a lapel pin, medal, etc.]	Any time an employee meeting criteria leaves VA.

SECRETARY'S HONOR AWARDS (CONTINUED)

Type of Award	Eligibility	Criteria	Form of Award	Due Date
Award for Valor	Any VA employee or group of VA employees.	For exhibiting great courage with voluntary risk of personal safety to prevent the loss of human life or government property. Contributions typically will be job related although non-job related acts of heroism may be considered. For those contributions representing good deeds where personal safety and welfare of employee is not threatened, a Secretary's Commendation can be considered. A commendation can also be considered more appropriate for non-work related acts of heroism.	A plaque from the Secretary. An honorarium of up to \$1,500 can also be awarded by the employee's key official.	As soon as possible after such an act or deed occurs.
Certificate of Commendation	A VA employee or group of employees. May also be granted to private citizens.	Granted for special efforts in the public interest in relation to official employment of such outstanding merit that recognition at the Secretary's level is appropriate. It may also be used at retirement or departure from VA to recognize outstanding career achievements that approach but do not meet the criteria for the Secretary's Distinguished Career Award (DCA).	Certificate of Commendation with citation signed by the Secretary.	At any time that criteria are met.
Certificate of Appreciation	A VA employee or group of employees. May also be granted to private citizens.	This is a general purpose award that may be granted to an individual VA employee, group of employees or private citizens for special contributions in the public interest that is related to official employment and is of such outstanding merit that an honor award granted at a lower organizational level would be inadequate. This award may also be granted for work-related or non-work-related acts of heroism in which the employee's life was not endangered. It may also be granted at time of retirement to recognize cumulative career achievements which approach but do not meet the standards for the Secretary's DCA. The award is a certificate with citation.	Certificate of Appreciation signed by the Secretary.	At any time to serve as an official thank you.

Nominating Procedures: VA Form 4659, along with appropriate narrative justification, must be submitted through appropriate channels and approved (or concurred in) by the organization's key official, prior to being forwarded to the Office of Human Resources Management for processing.

*Additional competitive awards, such as Olin E. Teague, Hands & Heart, [Diversity and Inclusion Excellence], etc. are announced throughout the year. Brief descriptions of such awards appear in the internal and external awards chart.

2. INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL HONOR AWARDS

Following is a listing of Honor Awards programs sponsored by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and outside organizations to recognize VA employees or organizations for their contributions to public service. The list is not all-inclusive as there are many local and regional awards programs which are not included. Please consult your local human resources office or human resources liaison for additional information on these awards.

Olin E. Teague Award (VA)

A VA award program to recognize the achievements in the rehabilitation and improvement in the quality of life of war-injured veterans. The award is honorary.

[Secretary's Annual Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Excellence Award

A VA award program to acknowledge employees, managers, and organizations within the Department who excelled in promoting and making significant contributions to the Department's ADR Program. It recognizes and highlights programs established to implement ADR in an innovative manner to include quality improvement techniques that contribute to the fair, efficient and effective resolution of disputes. This award may be a plaque, a certificate, and/or a cash award.

Secretary's Annual Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Awards

A VA award program to recognize and highlight the achievements made by a VA employee, manager, or team who promotes equal employment opportunity, diversity, and inclusion in the VA workforce to enhance work processes, workplace quality, organizational culture, and stakeholder satisfaction. The award maybe a plaque or cash award, or both.

Secretary's Award for Outstanding VA Employee with Disabilities (VA)

To recognize a VA employee who has performed in a consistently outstanding manner despite physical limitations.

Secretary's Hands and Heart Award (VA)

A program to recognize an employee in each medical facility who consistently does the most to provide emotional support, help, and guidance to patients, above and beyond the call of duty. It is emphasized that eligibility for this award encompasses the whole spectrum of personnel involved in direct patient care. The awards are honorary.

Secretary's Outstanding Volunteer Awards
(VACO only)

To recognize an individual or group of Central Office employees whose contributions to volunteer activities within their communities serve as examples of public involvement by Federal employees. The awards are honorary.

**Air Force Association's VA
Employee of the Year Award**

To recognize significant contributions to the mission of VA/Air Force Association by an employee or group of employees, with emphasis on the achievements of VA employees in serving America's veterans. It increases public knowledge and appreciation of the dedication and personal commitment of VA employees and encourages VA employees to strive for excellence in their daily work. No announcement is issued. Candidates for this program are individuals who received consideration for other internal/ external award programs. VACO manages this program. The award is a plaque, presented at the annual AFA convention in Washington, DC.

**Arthur S. Flemming Awards/Downtown
Jaycees of Wash., D.C.**

To honor outstanding Federal employees (under 40 years of age) who have performed meritorious work for the Government. The purpose of these awards is to attract outstanding persons to the Federal Government, to encourage high standards of performance in the Federal service, and to enhance appreciation of our form of Government and the opportunities it represents. The awards are honorary.

**Awards for Achievement in Information
Technology/American Management Systems**

To provide special recognition of senior executives and professionals who have made significant contributions to their organizations through especially effective use of computer systems and communications technology. The awards are honorary.

**Common Cause Annual Public Service
Achievement Awards/Common Cause**

To recognize public servants, citizen activists, elected officials at all levels of government reporters, or other citizens who have made an outstanding contribution to the public interest in the areas of government performance and integrity. The awards are honorary.

Donald L. Scantlebury Memorial Awards/
Joint Financial Management Improvement
Program

To recognize senior financial management executives who, through outstanding and continuous leadership in financial management, have been principally responsible for significant economies, efficiencies and improvements in Federal, state, or local government. The awards are honorary.

Emmett Leahy Award/Institute of
Certified Records Managers

To recognize outstanding individual accomplishments and professional contributions which have significantly advanced the information and records management profession. This award is honorary.

Executive Excellence Awards/
Senior Executives Association

To recognize career senior executives who have made significant contributions to improving the efficiency, effectiveness and productivity of the Federal Government as well as those whose performance has improved the image of the career Senior Executive Service. The awards are honorary.

Executive of the Year Award/Federal
Executive Institute Alumni Association

To recognize extraordinary achievement in executive management and leadership in Federal, state and local governments. The award is honorary.

Frontrunner Awards
sponsored by the Sara Lee Corporation

To recognize outstanding women who have excelled in four areas: the arts, business, government and the humanities. One recipient in each category will receive a specially-designed crystal and copper sculpture. In addition, \$25,000 per winner will be donated to a not-for-profit women's organization of the recipient's choice.

FTS 2000/General Services Administration

To recognize those individuals and groups who, in their use of FTS services (including local telecommunications services), have improved the quality and/or cost effectiveness of telecommunication services for their agency or FTS program.

GEICO Public Service Awards/
Government Employees
Insurance Company (GEICO)

To recognize career Federal employees for significant achievement and contribution in each of the following categories: (1) Substance Abuse Prevention Treatment; (2) Fire Prevention and Safety; (3) Physical Rehabilitation; and (4) Traffic Safety and Accident Prevention. A plaque and a \$2,500 cash award are presented to the winner in each of the four categories.

Henry Betts/Prince Charitable Trusts

This award honors an individual who has made significant contributions to the quality of life for people living with physical disabilities. The recipient will receive a \$50,000 prize and a commemorative crystal.

Innovations in American Government

To recognize various programs, sponsored by the Ford Foundation and particularly those which involve the John F. Kennedy School of Government interagency collaboration at Harvard University, tap the creativity of frontline employees, reshape agency missions and routines, or entail significant policy departures. Grants of \$100,000 will be awarded to the top 15 programs chosen by the National Selection Committee. Fifteen finalists will receive grants of \$20,000.

**IPMA Leading Edge Awards/
International Personnel Management
Association (IPMA)**

To recognize Federal employees in the personnel administration career field for singular accomplishments, and to encourage greater achievement among all Federal employees in the personnel administration field. The awards are honorary.

**Mary D. Pinkard Leader in Federal
Equity Award/Federally Employed Women
Legal and Education Fund**

To recognize Federal employees whose contributions have advanced the cause of equity in Federal employment, at personal and professional risk to themselves, and who have provided a positive role model to other Federal employees. The awards are honorary.

**National Capital Area Chapter of
ASPA Awards/American Society of
Public Administration (ASPA)**

To recognize outstanding contributions to the field of public administration and to the Chapter. There are four categories of awards: (1) the Outstanding Public Service Awards; (2) the Elmer B. Staats Award for accountability in Government; (3) the Chapter Service Awards; and (4) the Special Recognition Awards. The awards are honorary.

**National Public Service Awards/American
Society for Public Administration
National Academy of Public Administration**

To pay tribute to public service and practitioners whose careers exhibit the highest standard of excellence, dedication and accomplishment. These awards underscore the need to have creative and highly skilled individuals as managers of complex and demanding government functions. The awards are honorary.

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OPM Director's Awards for Outstanding Federal Health/Fitness Programs/ Office of Personnel Management (OPM)

To (1) recognize Federal organizations which provide effective health/fitness programs for their employees; (2) encourage the establishment/improvement of quality health/fitness programs; and (3) identify and publicize exemplary health/fitness programs that may serve as models for other organizations. Ten honorary awards are given annually.

OPM Work and Family Programs

To recognize those Federal organizations that are: providing innovative and effective work and family programs. Organizations will receive a plaque and a congratulatory letter.

Public Service Excellence Awards

To pay tribute to public organizations whose achievements exhibit the highest standard of excellence, innovation and accomplishments. The awards are honorary.

Roger W. Jones Award for Executive Leadership/The American University

To recognize career executives in the Federal Government whose Leadership has resulted in outstanding organizational achievement and who have successfully fostered the development of managers and executives for career service. The awards are honorary.

The William A. Jump Memorial Award/
The William A. Jump Memorial Foundation

To recognize and encourage outstanding and deserving career employees (under the age of 37) for sustained growth, development, integrity, and interest in the field of public administration. The awards are honorary.

Women in Science and Engineering Awards/Interagency Committee for Women in Science and Engineering

To recognize a specific or special scientific or technical contribution by a woman scientist or engineer in the Federal service in facilitating the advancement of women in science or engineering. The awards are honorary].

3. ORGANIZATIONAL AWARDS*

Type of Award	Eligibility	Criteria	Form of Award	Due Date
Exemplary Service Award	Any VA employee or group of VA employees.	This is the highest award given by an organization head and recognizes distinguished accomplishment(s) within the organization, including extraordinary leadership, skill, or ability in administration or performance of duty; employment-related heroism, outstanding deeds of courage, competency in an emergency, or for outstanding contributions in the public interest related to official employment. May also be used for retirement purposes when career achievements warrant recognition at this level.	A personalized certificate signed by the organization head.	As soon as possible after such an act or deed occurs.
Commendation	A VA employee or group of employees. May also be granted to private citizens.	Granted for special efforts in the public interest in relation to official employment of such outstanding merit that recognition at the organization head's level is appropriate. It may also be used at retirement or departure from VA to recognize outstanding career achievements that approach but do not meet the criteria for higher level recognition.	Certificate of Commendation with personalized citation signed by the organization head.	At any time that criteria are met.
Certificate of Appreciation	A VA employee or group of employees. May also be granted to private citizens.	This is a general purpose award that may be granted to an individual VA employee, group of employees or private citizens for special contributions in the public interest that may or may not be related to official employment. This award may also be granted for work-related or non-work-related acts of heroism in which the employee's life was not endangered. It may also be granted at time of retirement to recognize cumulative career achievements which approach but do not meet the standards for the higher recognition. The award is a certificate with citation.	Certificate of Appreciation signed by the organization head.	At any time to serve as an official thank you.

*Organizations may establish additional honor awards programs tied to accomplishment of organizational goals and objectives.

**4. PROCEDURES FOR REQUESTING SERVICE AWARDS FROM THE SECRETARY
(50, 55, 60, AND 65 YEARS OF SERVICE)**

a. Extraordinary careers spanning 50 years or more of Federal service are recognized by the Secretary with a personal letter, signed certificate and pin. For 55, 60 and 65 years of service, recognition includes a letter from the President and [gift box] from the Secretary.

b. Requests for such recognition should be prepared and submitted as soon as possible (preferably not later than 30 days prior to the eligibility date) to ensure timely recognition of these rare and exceptional service milestones. The request can be in the form of a memorandum to the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration (035), through appropriate organizational channels. Within VHA, requests should be submitted through appropriate local organizational channels to the Director, Management Support Office ([10A2A]), VA Central Office. To ensure proper and timely processing, the following information should be included with your request:

- (1) Full name of the employee, including any titles, and whether the letter should be addressed to Mr., Ms. or Mrs.;
- (2) Employee's title, facility name (or VACO organization) and mailing address;
- (3) Employee's Service Computation Date (please verify the date before submitting request);
- (4) Total years of service (broken down by dates of service for civilian positions held, position titles, and Federal department or agency). If the employee has military service, include the years of service, rank and branch of service;
- (5) Date employee achieves service milestone;
- (6) Brief statement or listing of awards/honors received;
- (7) Information on ceremonial arrangements (who will present and when ceremony is planned); and
- (8) Contact person and phone number in case additional information is needed.

APPENDIX B. CEREMONY CHECKLIST

1. Just as it is important that the recognition granted match the contribution that was made, the method of presentation should also match the individual and the contribution made. For on-the-spot or non-monetary award items, there may be little ceremony involved and if a ceremony is held, it might be brief and informal. For the more prestigious awards granted, a more formal setting or event may be appropriate. Regardless of the method of presentation selected, it is important to publicize employee achievements and recognition, even minor ones. Such publicity not only is a source of pride to the recipient of the recognition, but serves as an incentive to others to make contributions above and beyond job requirements and shows management's commitment to recognizing such efforts.
2. You may find the following checklist of areas/items helpful in planning an event:
 - a. Establish the date of the ceremony based on the availability of key officials/speakers/presenters and, of course, recipients;
 - b. Budget for such an event (cost of award(s), reception, decorations, etc.);
 - c. Invitation list and invitations -- establish RSVP date at least a week in advance of event to make final arrangements for refreshments;
 - d. Confirm the availability of people who may need to be there - 1) Master of Ceremonies, 2) Key Officials, 3) Photographer, 4) Chaplain, etc. (helpful to do in writing);
 - e. Determine location for event;
 - f. Arrange for podium or microphone for speakers (if necessary);
 - g. Make up and price ceremonial booklet, including the anticipated numbers;
 - h. Procure awards, prepare certificates, etc. (including getting certificates signed and framed, arrangements for checks if monetary awards are involved, etc.);
 - i. Determine food selections (including paper products, utensils, beverages);
 - j. Determine food source -- canteen, caterer, ask for donations of light refreshments from employees;
 - k. Plan and procure modest decorations, including flower arrangements, corsages/boutonnieres for recipients;
 1. Determine if travel expenses are justified (and therefore authorized) and any necessary arrangements in connection with such travel;
 - m. Make accommodations for hearing and/or physical impairments;

PART IV

APPENDIX B

- n. Obtain flags for ceremony (both US and VA if appropriate to the setting);
- o. Arrange for photographer;
- p. Prepare speeches for master of ceremonies and other key speakers highlighting the event and the accomplishments of those being recognized; and
- q. Arrange for building clearances for visitors (friends/families of recipients) that might be invited to the ceremony.

**[EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AND AWARDS PART V. TITLE 38 SPECIAL ADVANCEMENTS AND
CASH AWARDS**

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PART V. TITLE 38 SPECIAL ADVANCEMENTS AND CASH AWARDS

1. **SCOPE.** This part contains policies, procedures, and guidelines governing the advancement of [] optometrists, chiropractors, registered nurses, nurse anesthetists, physician assistants, and expanded-function dental auxiliaries appointed under authority of 38 U.S.C. § 7401(1) or § 7405(a); and hybrid-title 38 employees appointed under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3) or § 7405(a)(1)(B). Excluded are physicians[,] dentists and podiatrists appointed under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(1) and § 7405(a)(1); facility directors, chiefs of staff, medical and dental residents appointed under 38 U.S.C. § 7406; and health care executives appointed under 38 U.S.C. § 7306.
2. **REFERENCES.**
 - a. VA Directive 5017[, Employee Recognition and Awards.]
 - b. 38 U.S.C., Chapters 73 and 74.
3. **OFFICIALS AUTHORIZED TO APPROVE ADVANCEMENTS.** The Under Secretary for Health, or a designee, shall approve all advancements of employees covered by this part. (See Appendix A of this part.)
4. **CRITERIA FOR SPECIAL ADVANCEMENT FOR ACHIEVEMENT [(SAA)] FOR CERTAIN TITLE 38 EMPLOYEES.**
 - a. Full-time, part-time, and intermittent [], optometrists, chiropractors, registered nurses, nurse anesthetists, physician assistants and expanded-function dental auxiliaries appointed under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(1) or § 7405(a) may be advanced within grade from one to five steps, on the basis of professional achievement above that expected for the grade level or assignment, provided that they have demonstrated a high level of performance and assumption of greater responsibility, as outlined in paragraph b below.
 - b. The following is a list of the types of professional accomplishment that may be achieved, and the criteria required. An employee is not eligible for a[n] [SAA] if the professional accomplishment was achieved prior to appointment or as a result of VA funding, e.g., paying for training, paying for certification.
 - (1) **Certification.** Attainment of certification by an appropriate national certifying body, unless such certification: is a condition of employment with VA for the current position held; is a qualification requirement for promotion to a higher grade; or is used to justify a higher-level grade or assignment. An employee may only receive an SAA for attainment of specialty certification the first time that it is received; it cannot be granted for a renewal or after a lapse in the certification.
 - (a) A technically appropriate certification must meet all of the criteria below:
 - i. Be issued by a national certifying body; and
 - ii. Required attendance, virtually or in person, at a training class or self-taught

coursework/reading or other training required by the national certifying body; and

iii. Contain evidence that the employee passed a test at the end of the training program or successfully passed an examination as part of the certification process.

NOTE: Local, state, or regional certification programs and certification for work experience based upon receipt of another certification is not acceptable.

(b) Documentation of the criteria in paragraphs 4.b.(1)(a)i through iii must be included in the request for an SAA.

(c) Supervisor's Endorsement: The supervisor must indicate in the written submission in support of the SAA:

i. That at the time of the achievement and at the time of the SAA recommendation, the employee is performing at an Excellent/Highly Satisfactory or Outstanding level. The most recent rating of record is not sufficient to support this requirement unless it was issued within the past 30 calendar days; and

ii. How the knowledge gained by obtaining the certification will benefit VA and/or the duties that are being assumed for which the certification was obtained. Examples of these accomplishments must be provided; and

iii. How the employee will apply the knowledge in the performance of his/her current job duties.

(2) **Election to Office.** After serving a minimum of one term in an office in a professional organization, at the state or national level, in recognition of significant and distinguished contributions to the employee's occupation.

(a) A technically appropriate accomplishment must:

i. Include a letter from the professional organization appointing the employee to office for a designated period of time; and

ii. Include specific information about the employee's accomplishments made while serving in office with the confirmation of these accomplishments by the Chairperson/President, or other appropriate official if the employee is serving as the Chairperson/President of the professional organization; and

iii. Include information confirming the employee has completed at least one term in the office of the professional organization.

(b) Documentation of the criteria in paragraphs 4.b.(2)(a)i through iii must be included in the request for an SAA.

(c) This award will only be given after completion of at least one term. Only one SAA will be issued for this accomplishment, regardless of the number of terms served.

(d) Supervisor's Endorsement: The supervisor must indicate in the written submission in support of the SAA:

- i. That during the duration of the term with the professional organization and at the time of the SAA recommendation, the employee is performing at an Excellent/Highly Satisfactory or Outstanding level. Previous ratings of record may be used to support this level of rating during the term in which he/she served; and
- ii. The employee's current level of performance unless the most recent rating of record was issued within the past 30 calendar days; and
- iii. How the employee's accomplishments while serving with the professional organization have benefited VA. Examples of these accomplishments must be provided.

(3) Appointment to State Licensing Board (SLB) or National Certifying/Accrediting Body.

After serving a minimum of one term on a State Licensing Board or with a National Certifying/Accrediting Body related to the practice of the employee's occupation.

(a) A technically appropriate accomplishment must:

- i. Include a letter from the SLB or National Certifying/Accrediting Body appointing the employee to the position for a designated period of time; and
- ii. Include specific information about the employee's accomplishments made while serving in office with the confirmation of these accomplishments by the Chairperson/President, or other appropriate official if the employee is serving as the Chairperson/President of the SLB or National Certifying/Accrediting Body; and
- iii. Include information confirming the employee has completed at least one term in the SLB or National Certifying/Accrediting Body.

(b) Documentation of the criteria in paragraphs 4.b.(3)(a)i through iii must be included in the request for an SAA.

(c) The employee cannot receive consideration for an SAA until he/she has completed at least one term on an SLB or National Certifying/Accrediting Body. Only one SAA will be issued for this accomplishment, regardless of the number of terms served.

(d) Supervisor's Endorsement: The supervisor must indicate in the written submission in support of the SAA:

- i. That during the duration of the term with the SLB or the National Certifying/Accrediting Body and at the time of the SAA recommendation, the employee is performing at an Excellent/Highly Satisfactory or Outstanding level. Previous ratings of record may be used to support this level of rating during the term in which the employee served; and

- i. From an educational institute of higher learning accredited by the U.S. Department of Education; and
 - ii. In a health care field related to the individual's current occupation with VA.
- (b) Documentation of the criteria in paragraph 4.b.(5)(a)i and ii must be included in the request for an SAA.
- (c) Supervisor's Endorsement: The supervisor must indicate in the written submission in support of SAA:
 - i. That at the time of the achievement and at the time of the SAA recommendation, the employee is performing at an Excellent/Highly Satisfactory or Outstanding level. The most recent rating of record is not sufficient to support this requirement unless it was issued within the past 30 calendar days; and
 - ii. How the knowledge gained by obtaining the higher level of education will benefit VA; and
 - iii. How the employee will apply the knowledge in the performance of his/her job duties.
- (6) **Professional Award.** Receipt of a non-monetary professional award, at the state or national level, in recognition of significant contributions to the employee's field of expertise.
 - (a) A technically appropriate professional award must:
 - i. Include a copy of the nomination for the professional award, which must provide sufficient information to explain the employee's significant contribution to the employee's field of expertise; and
 - ii. Be a professional award given at the state or national level.
 - (b) Documentation of the criteria in 4.b.(6)(a)i and ii must be included in the request for an SAA.
 - (c) Supervisor's Endorsement: The supervisor must indicate in the written submission in support of the SAA:
 - i. That at the time of the achievement and at the time of the SAA recommendation, the employee is performing at an Excellent/Highly Satisfactory or Outstanding level. The most recent rating of record is not sufficient to support this requirement unless it was issued within the past 30 calendar days; and
 - ii. How the employee's professional contribution that warranted state or national recognition through the issuance of an award benefits VA. Examples of these contributions must be provided; and

iii. How the employee will apply the knowledge gained in the performance of his/her job duties.

- c. **Number of Steps.** A step increase not only increases an employee's base pay but also increases the cost of retirement benefits and Government life insurance for covered employees, and often results in a higher basic pay adjustment upon promotion of the employee. Since a step increase represents an increase in base pay, this type of recognition may increase an organization's budget well into the future. Therefore, the Professional Standards Board (PSB) must be fiscally responsible when recommending the number of steps to be granted for each achievement and must carefully assess the value of the employee's contribution to the Agency and its mission. Additionally, the relationship between the number of steps to be granted and amount of pay for each step should also be considered when granting SAAs. A four- or five-step advancement should only be granted in extremely unusual situations when the achievement is deemed to be an exceptional contribution to the Agency and its mission.
- d. **Top Step of the Grade.** Employees at the top step of their grade cannot receive a step increase. Therefore, for those employees who are at the top step of their grade and who also meet all of the criteria for an SAA, the PSB will make a recommendation to the approving official (see Appendix A of this part) as to the amount of a cash award that may be appropriate based on the value of the employee's contribution to the Agency and its mission. Only employees at the top step of their grade may receive a cash award in lieu of an SAA. Registered nurses and certified registered nurse anesthetists who obtain a specialty certification and are at the top step of the grade will only be granted a cash award under the provisions of paragraph 10(b) of this part; they are not eligible for a cash award in lieu of an SAA for obtaining a specialty certification. All cash awards will be documented on VA Form 4659.
- e. **Criteria.** National PSBs and local facilities may develop criteria to assist with the consistency of application when PSBs recommend the awarding of SAAs. However, local Human Resources Offices are responsible for ensuring that all of the criteria are met for each award submission.
- f. **Discretion.** Approving officials may approve or disapprove awards, at their discretion, for non-discriminatory reasons, e.g., budget limitations, disagreement with the value of the contribution made by the employee to the Agency or its mission.

5. PROCESSING AND DOCUMENTING SPECIAL ADVANCEMENT FOR ACHIEVEMENT FOR CERTAIN TITLE 38 EMPLOYEES (INCLUDING USE OF PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS BOARDS).

- a. Employees will typically submit evidence of professional accomplishment within 14 calendar days after the achievement is obtained, but documentation may be accepted up to 30 calendar days after the achievement when extenuating circumstances exist, e.g., lengthy illness, inability to get documentation from certifying body.

NOTE: Agency budget limitations are not an extenuating circumstance. Facilities should

appropriately allocate and manage the annual award budget so that deserving employees are recognized throughout the fiscal year. Lack of funding at the time of achievement will not result in the employee being recognized at a later date, or when funds become available.

- b.** The immediate supervisor, or higher-level official, will review the employee's submission and within 14 calendar days:

 - (1) Make a determination as to whether or not to support the employee's submission with a formal recommendation for an SAA. (Note: This determination by the immediate supervisor or higher-level official is discretionary.); and
 - (2) Consult with Fiscal or Human Resources to determine if the award budget allows for award recognition and compliance with local award policies; and
 - (3) If the criteria for the award are met and funding is available, make a recommendation including the appropriate justification as outlined in paragraph 4 of this part.
- c.** The award nomination and all required justification and documentation attached will be forwarded to the service chief or equivalent, or Chief of Staff or Associate Director or Associate Director for Patient Care Services, who will submit it to Human Resources so that it will be received no later than 30 calendar days after the achievement, or 60 calendar days after the achievement when extenuating circumstances exist, e.g., supervisor was on extended leave or additional information from the employee was needed.
- d.** Human Resources will conduct an initial technical review of the award prior to submission to the appropriate PSB (see NOTE below) to ensure that all information has been provided by the employee and supervisor, and the policy requirements have been met. Additional information obtained by Human Resources during the technical review process will be attached to the award nomination. If the award submission does not meet technical requirements due to lack of justification provided by the immediate supervisor, it will be returned to the supervisor within seven calendar days with an explanation of what information is needed or why technical requirements have not been met. Otherwise, if the award meets technical requirements, Human Resources will submit the nomination to the PSB within seven calendar days following receipt of the award. Human Resources will document, as part of the submission to the PSB, that an HR technical review was completed. For those SAAs that go to a National PSB for review, a copy of the local SAA policy will be submitted with the nomination. (See NOTE below for additional information about SAAs for optometrists.)
- e.** The PSB will conduct a review and will make a recommendation to approve or disapprove the submission. If recommending approval, the PSB will recommend an appropriate number of steps to be granted. The PSB will document on the board action justification to support its recommendation. The board action, with supporting justification from the PSB recommending approval or disapproval of the award, will be forwarded to the appropriate Human Resources Office on VA Form 10-2543.
- f.** Before the board action and award justification are forwarded to the appropriate approving official as outlined in Appendix A of this part, Human Resources will review and sign the board action to certify the board's recommendation meets technical and regulatory requirements.

- g. The approving official will make a final decision on the board's recommendation and will complete and sign the board action, as appropriate. After the approving official signs VA Form 10-2543, Human Resources will contact the supervisor to initiate a Standard Form 52 (SF-52) for the number of steps approved for the SAA.
- h. Upon approval of the SAA by the approving official, the SAA will be processed in a timely manner and effective the pay period following the date signed by the approving official.
- i. Approving officials may approve or disapprove SAAs at their discretion for non-discriminatory reasons, e.g., budget limitations, disagreement with the value of the contribution made by the employee to the Agency or its mission.

NOTE: SAA recommendations for optometrists will be made to the VA Central Office Optometry Professional Standards Board through the facility's Human Resources Office by the service chief or Chief of Staff, as appropriate.

Submissions to the VA Central Office Optometry Professional Standards Board for special advancements shall include a cover letter with grade or step(s) increase request information; Standard Form 50 (SF-50) showing the employee's anniversary date of grade; updated curriculum vitae; latest last three proficiency reports (or what is available); latest SF-50; last three board action reports (or what is available) approved by Facility Director; recommendation from the rating official; and Human Resources point of contact. A VA Central Office Optometry Professional Standards Board checklist to assist with this process can be accessed at the following Office of Human Resources Management Web site link:

<http://vaww1.va.gov/ohrm/Staffing/Title38Appts.htm>.

The Human Resources Management Officer, VA Maryland Healthcare System, or designee, shall serve as the technical representative to the VA Central Office Optometry Professional Standards Board. Additional program information covering optometrists can be obtained through the Director of Optometry Service or the VHA Optometry Service website via the following link:
<http://vaww1.va.gov/optometry/>.

6. CRITERIA FOR SPECIAL ADVANCEMENT FOR ACHIEVEMENT FOR HYBRID-TITLE 38 EMPLOYEES.

- a. Full-time, part-time, and intermittent hybrid-title 38 employees appointed under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3) or § 7405(a)(1)(B) may be advanced within grade from one to five steps, on the basis of professional achievement above that expected for the grade level or assignment, provided that they have demonstrated a high level of performance and assumption of greater responsibility as outlined in paragraph b below. All SAA nominations for hybrid-title 38 employees will be submitted on VA Form 4659, with appropriate justification attached.
- b. The following is a list of the types of professional accomplishment that may be achieved, and the criteria required. An employee is not eligible for an SAA if the professional accomplishment was achieved prior to appointment or as a result of VA funding, e.g. paying for training, paying for certification.

(1) **Certification.** Attainment of certification by an appropriate national certifying body, unless such certification is a condition of employment with VA for the current position held, or is a qualification requirement for promotion to a higher grade, or is used to justify a higher-level grade or assignment. An employee may only receive an SAA for attainment of specialty certification the first time that it is received; it cannot be granted for a renewal or after a lapse in the certification.

(a) A technically appropriate certification must meet all the criteria below:

- i. Be issued by a national certifying body; and
- ii. Have included attendance virtually, or in person at a training class, or self-taught coursework/reading; and
- iii. Contain evidence that the employee passed a test at the end of the training program or successfully passed an examination as part of the certification process.

NOTE: Local, state, or regional certification programs and certification for work experience or based upon receipt of another certification is not acceptable.

(b) Documentation of the criteria in paragraphs 6.b.(1)(a)i through iii must be included in the request for an SAA.

(c) Supervisor's Endorsement: The supervisor must indicate in the written submission in support of the SAA:

- i. That at the time of the achievement and at the time of the SAA recommendation, the employee is performing at an Excellent/Highly Satisfactory or Outstanding level. The most recent rating of record is not sufficient to support this requirement unless it was issued within the past 30 calendar days; and
- ii. How the knowledge gained by obtaining the certification will be of benefit to VA and/or the duties that are being assumed for which the certification was obtained. Examples of these accomplishments must be provided; and
- iii. How the employee will apply the knowledge in the performance of his/her current job duties.

(2) **Election to Office.** After serving for a minimum of one term in an office in a professional organization at the state or national level, in recognition of significant and distinguished contributions to the employee's occupation.

(a) A technically appropriate accomplishment must:

- i. Include a letter from the professional organization appointing the employee to office for a designated period; and
- ii. Include specific information about the employee's accomplishments made while

- (c) The employee cannot receive consideration for an SAA until he/she has completed at least one term on an SLB or National Certifying/Accrediting Body. Only one SAA will be issued for this accomplishment, regardless of the number of terms served.
 - (d) Supervisor's Endorsement: The supervisor must indicate in the written submission in support of the SAA:
 - i. That during the duration of the term with the SLB or the National Certifying/Accrediting Body and at the time of the SAA recommendation, the employee is performing at an Excellent/Highly Satisfactory or Outstanding level. Previous ratings of record may be used to support this level of rating during the term in which the employee served; and
 - ii. The employee's current level of performance unless the most recent rating of record was issued within the past 30 calendar days; and
 - iii. How the employee's accomplishments while serving on the SLB or with the National Certifying/Accrediting Body have benefited VA. Examples of these accomplishments must be provided.
- (4) **Published Research.** Independently producing or serving as a principal assistant or major contributing member of a research project that advances patient care or health care and authors or co-authors results in a national or international journal.
- (a) A technically appropriate achievement in research must:
 - i. Include a copy of the national or international publication containing the article resulting from the research project, ensuring that it demonstrates the employee was the author or co-author; and
 - ii. Include sufficient information to explain how the research advances patient care or health care; and
 - iii. Include the name and role of the employee in the journal article with sufficient information to demonstrate he/she independently produced or was serving as the principal assistant or a major contributing member of the research.
 - (b) Documentation of the criteria in paragraph 6.b.(4)(a)i through iii must be included in the request for an SAA.
 - (c) Supervisor's Endorsement: The supervisor must indicate in the written submission in support of the SAA:
 - i. That at the time of the achievement and at the time of the SAA recommendation, the employee is performing at an Excellent/Highly Satisfactory or Outstanding level. The most recent rating of record is not sufficient to support this requirement unless it was issued within the past 30 calendar days; and

support of the SAA:

- i. That at the time of the achievement and at the time of the SAA recommendation, the employee is performing at an Excellent/Highly Satisfactory or Outstanding level. The most recent rating of record is not sufficient to support this requirement unless it was issued within the past 30 calendar days; and
- ii. How the employee's professional contribution that warranted state or national recognition through the issuance of an award benefits VA. Examples of these contributions must be provided; and
- iii. How the employee will apply the knowledge gained in the performance of his/her job duties.

- c. Number of Steps.** A step increase not only increases an employee's base pay but also increases the cost of retirement benefits and Government life insurance for covered employees, and often results in a higher basic pay adjustment upon promotion of the employee. Since a step increase represents an increase in base pay, this type of recognition may increase an organization's budget well into the future. Additionally, the relationship between the number of steps to be granted and the amount of pay for each step should also be considered when granting SAAs. A four- or five-step advancement should only be granted in extremely unusual situations when the achievement is deemed to be an exceptional contribution to the Agency and its mission.
- d. Top Step of the Grade.** Employees at the top step of their grade cannot receive a step increase. Therefore, the approving official may grant a cash award, appropriate with the value of the employee's contribution to the Agency and its mission, to those employees who are at the top step of their grade and who also meet the criteria for an SAA. Only employees at the top step of their grade may receive a cash award in lieu of an SAA. All cash awards will be documented on VA Form 4659.
- e. Criteria.** Local facilities may develop criteria to assist with the consistency of application when awarding Special Advancements for Achievement. However, local Human Resources Offices are responsible for ensuring that all of the criteria are met for each award submission.
- f. Discretion.** Approving officials may approve or disapprove awards, at their discretion, for non-discriminatory reasons, e.g., budget limitations, disagreement with the value of the contribution made by the employee to the Agency or its mission.

7. PROCESSING AND DOCUMENTING SPECIAL ADVANCEMENTS FOR ACHIEVEMENT FOR HYBRID-TITLE 38 EMPLOYEES.

Employees will typically submit evidence of professional accomplishment within 14 calendar days after obtaining achievement, but documentation may be accepted up to 30 calendar days after the achievement when extenuating circumstances exist, e.g., lengthy illness, inability to get documentation from certifying body.

NOTE: Agency budget limitations are not an extenuating circumstance. Facilities should appropriately allocate and manage the annual award budget so that deserving employees are

recognized throughout the fiscal year. Lack of funding at the time of achievement will not result in the employee being recognized at a later date when funds become available.

- a. The immediate supervisor, or higher-level official, will review the employee's submission and within 14 calendar days:
 - (1) Make a determination as to whether or not to support the employee's submission with a formal recommendation for an SAA. (Note: This determination by the immediate supervisor or higher-level official is discretionary.)
 - (2) Consult with Fiscal or Human Resources to determine if the award budget allows for award recognition and compliance with local award policies; and
 - (3) If the criteria for the award are met and funding is available, make a recommendation including the appropriate justification as outlined in paragraph 4 of this part.
- b. The award nomination and all required justification and documentation attached will be forwarded to the service chief or equivalent, or Chief of Staff or Associate Director or Associate Director for Patient Care Services, who will submit it to Human Resources so that it will be received no later than 30 calendar days after the achievement, or 60 calendar days after the achievement when extenuating circumstances exist, e.g., supervisor was on extended leave or additional information from the employee was needed.
- c. Human Resources will conduct an initial technical review of the award prior to submission to the approving official to ensure that all information has been provided by the employee and supervisor, and the policy requirements have been met. Any additional information obtained by Human Resources during the technical review process will be attached to the award nomination. If the award submission does not meet technical requirements due to lack of justification provided by the immediate supervisor, it will be returned to the supervisor within seven calendar days with an explanation of what information is needed or why technical requirements have not been met. Otherwise, if the award meets technical requirements, Human Resources will submit the nomination to the approving official within seven calendar days following receipt of the award submission and document on VA Form 4659 that an HR technical review occurred prior to submission.
- d. The approving official (See Appendix A of this part) will make a final decision on granting the recommended award and the number of steps to be granted. The approving official will complete and sign VA Form 4659. After the approving official signs VA Form 4659, Human Resources will contact the supervisor to initiate an SF-52 for the number of steps approved for the SAA. In the event the employee is at the top step of the grade and a cash award is granted in lieu of a step increase, an SF-52 is not necessary.
- e. Upon approval of the SAA by the approving official, the SAA will be processed in a timely manner and effective the pay period following the date signed by the approving official.
- f. Approving officials may approve or disapprove SAAs, at their discretion, for non-discriminatory reasons, e.g., budget limitations, disagreement with the value of the contribution made by the employee to the Agency or its mission.

8. CRITERIA FOR SPECIAL ADVANCEMENT FOR PERFORMANCE (SAP).

- a. Consideration.** Full-time, part-time, and intermittent [] optometrists, chiropractors, registered nurses, nurse anesthetists, physician assistants, and expanded-function dental auxiliaries who have demonstrated a sustained high level of performance and professional competence over and above that normally expected of employees in the particular grade and profession, or who have made noted contributions in some phase of their profession, may be considered for SAPs. Hybrid-title 38 positions may be considered in accordance with subparagraph d of [] paragraph 8. Union officials serving on 100 percent official time, who do not perform sufficient management-assigned duties to receive an evaluation of their performance, are not eligible for SAPs.

NOTE: Supervisors and managers may only be considered for SAPs at the end of the Executive Career Field (ECF) rating cycle. (See VA Handbook 5013, Performance Management System, Part I, and Appendix F of Part I.)

- b. [] Optometrists, Chiropractors, Physician Assistants, and Expanded-Function Dental Auxiliaries.** An advancement of one step may be granted on the same due date established for a periodic step increase. (See NOTE below.) The employee must have demonstrated a sustained high level of performance, and demonstrate exceptional skills and aptitudes in the care and treatment of patients.
- c. Registered Nurses and Nurse Anesthetists.** An advancement of one step within the grade may be granted to covered employees when there has been a demonstrated sustained high level of performance and ability over and above that normally expected of employees in the particular grade and profession. (See NOTE below.) In addition, one or more of the criteria listed in VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, Part III, Chapter 4, paragraph 6 must be met.
- d. Hybrid-Title 38 Employees in Occupations Identified in 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3).** The Quality Step Increase provisions in Part III, paragraph 3 of this handbook will be used to grant one-step special advancements for performance for employees in occupations listed under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3). The step increase will be coded as 894G. Special advancement for performance recommendations for hybrid-title 38 employees will not require review by a PSB. Instead, recommendations will be forwarded directly to the appropriate approving official listed in Appendix A of this part. (See NOTE below.)
- e. Discretion.** Approving officials may approve or disapprove awards, at their discretion, for non-discriminatory reasons, e.g., budget limitations, disagreement with the value of the contribution made by the employee to the Agency or its mission.
- f. Combination Award.** Employees may receive a Superior Performance Award and an SAP, but the amount of the award cannot exceed the value of the accomplishment. Refer to Part I, paragraph 4 [of this handbook] for additional information.

NOTE: Individuals at the top step of their grade cannot receive an increase to base pay; however, they may be recognized with a Superior Performance Award in accordance with Part III of this handbook.

9. PROCESSING AND DOCUMENTING SPECIAL ADVANCEMENTS FOR PERFORMANCE.

a. General.

- (1) Human Resources Management Officers shall assure that appropriate officials will be notified in anticipation of eligibility. Approximately 90 calendar days prior to the employee completing the waiting period for a periodic step increase or rate adjustment, the facility will receive from the Austin Automation Center[], VA Form 97, Notice of Pending Personnel Action, identifying the employee and stating that the employee is eligible for consideration for an SAP.
- (2) The immediate supervisor or higher-level official will submit appropriate justification as outlined in paragraph [8] of this part with a completed VA Form 4659, the performance appraisal or proficiency rating, and generate an SF-52. The award nomination will be forwarded to the service chief or equivalent, or Chief of Staff or Associate Director or Associate Director of Patient Care Services, who will submit it to Human Resources so that it will be received no later than 30 calendar days following the completion of the employee's waiting period for a periodic step increase or rate adjustment.
- (3) Human Resources will conduct an initial technical review of the award prior to submission to the appropriate PSB to ensure that all information has been provided by the supervisor, and the policy requirements have been met. If the award submission does not meet technical requirements due to lack of justification provided by the immediate supervisor, it will be returned to the supervisor within seven calendar days with an explanation as to what information is needed. Otherwise, if the award meets technical requirements, Human Resources will submit the nomination to the PSB within seven calendar days following receipt of the award submission and document whether the award nomination meets or does not meet technical requirements, with an explanation as to why it does not, when applicable.
 - (4) The PSB will make a specific recommendation with the appropriate number of steps to be granted, when applicable. The board action, with supporting justification from the PSB recommending approval or disapproval of the award, will be forwarded to Human Resources on VA Form 10-2543.
 - (5) Human Resources will review and sign the board action to certify that the board's recommendation meets technical and regulatory requirements before the board action and award justification is forwarded to the appropriate approving official, as outlined in Appendix A of this part.
 - (6) SAPs will be processed as soon as possible after the end of the employee's rating cycle but typically no later than 90 calendar days after the end of the rating cycle.

b. []Optometrists[] and Chiropractors.

- (1) An advancement of one step, not to exceed the maximum of the grade, may on the same due date established for a periodic step increase. The advancement shall be

regarded as an equivalent increase.

- (2) No two such advancements may be granted in succession within the grade.

NOTE: To process special advancements for performance for optometrists, follow steps 9.a.(1) and 9.a.(2) shown above. In step 9.a.(3), recommendations will be made to the VA Central Office Optometry Professional Standards Board by the chief of service or Chief of Staff, as appropriate, through the facility HRM office.

Submissions to the VA Central Office Optometry Professional Standards Board for special advancements for performance shall include a cover letter with grade or step(s) increase request information; Standard Form 50 (SF-50) showing the employee's anniversary date of grade; updated curriculum vitae; latest SF-50; last three proficiency reports (or what is available); last three board action reports (or what is available) approved by a Facility Director; recommendation from the rating official; and facility HRM office point of contact. A VA Central Office Optometry Professional Standards Board checklist, to assist with this process, can be accessed at the following Office of Human Resources Management Web site link: <http://vaww1.va.gov/ohrm/Staffing/Title38Appts.htm>.

The VA Central Office Optometry Professional Standards Board will make a specific recommendation with the appropriate number of steps to be granted. The board action, with supporting justification, will be returned to the facility HRM office. Thereafter, special advancements for performance of optometrists will be processed in accordance with steps 9.a.(5) and 9.a.(6), as appropriate.

The Human Resources Management Officer, VA Maryland Healthcare System, or designee, shall serve as the technical representative to the VA Central Office Optometry Professional Standards Board. Additional program information covering optometrists can be obtained through the Director of Optometry Service or the VHA Optometry Service Web site via the following link: <http://vaww1.va.gov/optometry/>.

c. Registered Nurses, Nurse Anesthetists, Physician Assistants, and Expanded-Function Dental Auxiliaries.

- (1) An advancement of one step, not to exceed the maximum of the grade, may be granted at any appropriate time within any 52-week period.
- (2) The advancement shall not be regarded as an equivalent increase or in lieu of a periodic step increase.
- (3) No more than one such advancement may be granted within any single 52-week period.

d. Hybrids. Employees in occupations identified in 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3) are eligible for one-step special advancements for performance, subject to meeting the criteria for Quality Step Increases, which is outlined in Part III of this handbook.

10. CRITERIA FOR CASH AWARDS FOR FULL-TIME, PART-TIME, AND INTERMITTENT REGISTERED NURSES, NURSE ANESTHETISTS[, AND PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS] APPOINTED UNDER 38 U.S.C. §§ 7306, 7401(1) AND 7405.

a. General.

- (1) Cash awards for specialty certification and cash awards for exemplary job performance and exemplary job achievement, as outlined under this paragraph, are in addition to special advancements mentioned previously in this chapter.
- (2) A registered nurse[,], nurse anesthetist[, or physician assistant] may not receive a:
 - (a) Special Advancement for Performance and a Special Contribution Award based on the same performance; or
 - (b) [Superior Performance Award] and a cash award for exemplary job performance and exemplary job achievement during the same rating cycle; or
 - (c) Special Advancement for Achievement and a Special Contribution Award based on the same achievement or contribution.
- (3) When it is determined appropriate and the established criteria for each type of award has been met, a registered nurse[,], nurse anesthetist[, or physician assistant] may be granted a combination award such as:
 - (a) Special Advancement for Performance and a cash award for exemplary job performance and exemplary job achievement as outlined below; or
 - (b) Special Advancement for Achievement and a cash award for exemplary job performance and exemplary job achievement as outlined below; or
 - (c) Special Advancement for Performance and a Superior Performance Award; or
 - (d) Special Advancement for Achievement and cash award for specialty certification as outlined below.

b. Cash Award for Specialty Certification.

- (1) The Director or designee is required in accordance with 38 U.S.C. § 7452(b)(1)(A) to grant a cash award of up to \$2,000 to registered nurses, nurse anesthetists, and physician assistants who become certified while on VA rolls in a specialty related to the accomplishment of VA's health care mission.
- (2) A cash award for specialty certification is a mechanism for recognizing registered nurses, nurse anesthetists, and physician assistants who have been certified in a clinical specialty area by an appropriate national certifying body. Specialty certification does not include recertification or renewal of previously held certifications but does include second and subsequent certifications, as well as advanced certification, provided the requirements for

advanced certification are clearly in addition to basic certification.

(3) Establishment of Written Policy Concerning Cash Awards for Specialty Certification.

(a) Responsibilities:

- i. Facility Directors shall establish a written policy for granting a cash award to registered nurses, nurse anesthetists, and physician assistants who obtain specialty certification while on VA rolls.
- ii. The Human Resources Management Officer will be responsible for developing and coordinating this policy with appropriate facility officials prior to the Facility Director's approval.

(b) The amount of the award shall be based on criteria established by the Facility Director (see subparagraph (d) below); however, awards may also take into consideration management and/or PSB recommendations, including decisions concerning the relatedness of a certificate to the facility's health care mission and an employee's assignment.

(c) To the extent feasible, the policy will include information on specialty certification that does not establish eligibility for a cash award because it has been locally determined that the particular certification is not related to the facility's health care mission.

(d) The following criteria should be used and outlined in local policy when granting cash awards for certification:

- i. Whether the certification is based solely on experience, or successful completion of a comprehensive examination or training program, or a combination thereof;
- ii. The relationship of the certification to the registered nurse, nurse anesthetist, or physician assistant's job duties;
- iii. Proration of the award based on part-time or intermittent employment;
- iv. Registered nurse, nurse anesthetist, or physician assistant's performance or proficiency rating;
- v. Facility recruitment or retention needs; and
- vi. Any other criteria considered appropriate.

(4) The registered nurse, nurse anesthetist, or physician assistant will typically submit evidence of professional accomplishment within 14 calendar days after obtaining achievement. Cash awards for specialty certification will normally be made within 60 calendar days after the registered nurse, nurse anesthetist, or physician assistant presents a copy of the certificate to the appropriate facility official. A copy of the certificate will be filed with a completed VA Form 4659 in Human Resources. Registered nurses, nurse anesthetists, and physician assistants who became certified before April 7, 1991, or who

become certified before becoming a registered nurse, nurse anesthetist, or physician assistant with the Department are not eligible for a cash award for specialty certification.

- (5) Nurse anesthetists appointed or re-appointed on or after May 4, 1993, must be certified by the Council on Certification of Nurse Anesthetists as a condition of employment. They are not eligible for cash awards for specialty certification.
- (6) Registered nurses, nurse anesthetists, or physician assistants who receive a certification as a result of VA funding, or the certification is a condition of employment with VA for the current position held, or the certification is a qualification requirement for promotion to a higher grade, or is used to justify a higher level are not eligible for a cash award.

c. Cash Award for Exemplary Job Performance and Exemplary Job Achievement.

- (1) Facility Directors may grant a cash award of up to \$2,000 to registered nurses, nurse anesthetists, or physician assistants who demonstrate both exemplary job performance and exemplary job achievement. (See 38 U.S.C. § 7452(b)(1)(B).) To receive an award, the employee's latest Proficiency Report must be Highly Satisfactory or above, and the employee must meet the criteria under one of the following subparagraphs:
 - (a) Significant and distinguished contribution(s) in some phase of health care as evidenced by original research, writings, and publications in professional media of stature (e.g., reference journals);
 - (b) Special recognition in the fields of teaching or professional practice;
 - (c) Special competence in the occupation, as evidenced by service with professionally recognized committees or groups, or responsible office in professional societies above the local level, or consultative services within the profession. The competence attained must be supported by achievement of renown, on a regional or wider basis;
 - (d) Expertise in specialized treatment modalities, outstanding competence as a clinical practitioner, or significant contributions concerning some aspect of the profession; or
 - (e) Other appropriate evidence of professional stature equivalent to the above.
- (2) Registered nurses, nurse anesthetists, or physician assistants may not receive a Superior Performance Award and an exemplary job performance and exemplary job achievement award during the same rating cycle.

APPENDIX A. PERSONNEL AUTHORIZED TO APPROVE SPECIAL ADVANCEMENTS FOR ACHIEVEMENT OR PERFORMANCE/APPROVING OFFICIALS

1. **Under Secretary for Health or designee.** Advancements of those covered by the scope of this handbook when the Under Secretary for Health or designee is the appointing official.
2. **Network Directors.** Advancements of those covered by the scope of this handbook and VA Directive 5017 when the Network Director is the appointing official.
3. **Facility Directors.**
 - a. Advancements of optometrists.

[]
 - [b.] Advancements of expanded-function dental auxiliaries.
 - [c.] Advancements of chiropractors.
 - [d.] Advancements of registered nurses and nurse anesthetists. Facility Directors may also delegate* approval authority to the Associate Director for Patient Care Services the advancement of registered nurses and nurse anesthetists in noncentralized assignments below Nurse IV.
 - [e.] Advancements of physician assistants.
 - [f.] Advancements of pharmacists. Facility Directors may also delegate* approval authority to the Chief of Pharmacy Service the advancement of pharmacists in noncentralized assignments below GS-13 and assistant chiefs of Pharmacy Service at GS-13.
 - [g.] Advancements of occupational therapists. Facility Directors may also delegate* approval authority to chiefs of staff the advancements of occupational therapists in noncentralized assignments below GS-13.
 - [h.] Advancements of registered respiratory therapists. Facility Directors may also delegate* approval authority to chiefs of staff the advancements of registered respiratory therapists.
 - [i.] Advancements of certified respiratory therapists. Facility Directors may also delegate* approval authority to chiefs of staff the advancements of certified respiratory therapists.
 - [j.] Advancements of licensed practical or vocational nurses. Facility Directors may also delegate* approval authority to nurse executives the advancements of licensed practical or vocational nurses.
 - [k.] Advancements of physical therapists. Facility Directors may also delegate* approval authority to chiefs of staff the advancements of physical therapists.

[I.] Advancements of other occupations covered by 38 U.S.C. 7401(3), other than those listed in subparagraph 3g. through 3l., e.g., pharmacy technicians, medical instrument technicians, medical record technicians, dental hygienists, dental assistants, nuclear medicine technologists, occupational therapy assistants, therapeutic radiologic technologists, physical therapy assistants, diagnostic radiologic technicians, prosthetic representatives, and orthotist-prosthetists. Facility Directors may also delegate* approval authority for the advancement of these occupations to chiefs of staff.

*NOTE: Only the Facility Director may act as both the recommending and approving official for Special Advancements for Achievement or Special Advancement for Performance.]