

INDIAN AFFAIRS MANUAL

1.1 Purpose. This policy documents the options and requirements for recognizing individual and group achievement, and acknowledging contributions that lead to achievement of organizational, team, or individual results. When appropriate, Indian Affairs (IA) will recognize and reward employees whose individual or group efforts have contributed to the efficiency, economy, or increased effectiveness of IA.

1.2 Scope. This policy applies to all employees under the authority of the Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs (AS-IA), including AS-IA offices, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). This policy does not apply to employees in the Senior Executive Service (SES); performance appraisal procedures for the SES are in 5 CFR 430 Subpart C and 370 Departmental Manual (DM) 451.2.

1.3 Policy. It is the policy of IA to ensure that all awards and recognition comply with applicable laws and with Department of the Interior (DOI) policies and requirements. IA strives to ensure that individuals and/or groups are appropriately recognized and rewarded in an equitable and commensurate manner for superior performance or other efforts that substantially exceed normal expectations and result in improved productivity or services.

1.4 Authority.

A. Statutes and Regulations.

- 1) 5 U.S.C. 43, Performance Appraisal
- 2) 5 U.S.C. 45, Incentive Awards
- 3) 5 CFR 430, Performance Management
- 4) 5 CFR 451, Awards
- 5) 5 CFR 530, Pay Rates and Systems (General)
- 6) 5 CFR 531, Pay Under the General Schedule

B. Guidance.

- 1) Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Guide to Processing Awards Requiring OPM Approval, 2011
- 2) 370 DM 430: Performance Management System
- 3) 370 DM 451.1: Awards and Recognition Program - General

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- 4) 370 DM 451.2: Awards and Recognition Program - Performance Awards
- 5) 370 DM 451.3: Awards and Recognition Program - Honor Awards
- 6) 370 DM 451.4: Awards and Recognition Program - Monetary Awards
- 7) 370 DM 451.6: Awards and Recognition Program - Outside Awards
- 8) DOI Personnel Bulletin No. 19-13, Changes to Departmental Manual Chapter 370 DM 451.2, Performance Awards, September 20, 2019

1.5 Responsibilities.

- A. **Deputy Assistant Secretary – Management (DAS-M)** is responsible for the overall development and administration of Human Capital Management (HCM) policy for IA.
- B. **Director, Office of Human Capital Management (OHCM), DAS-M** is responsible for assisting programs with identifying HCM needs and formulating policies to affect a viable IA program. This office is also responsible for the technical compliance review and coordination of award recommendations that must be endorsed or approved by the AS-IA.
- C. **Servicing Human Resources Offices (HROs)** are responsible for assisting managers/supervisors in recognizing and rewarding exceptional employee performance. Servicing HROs must also review all monetary awards processed by their region each fiscal year (FY). The review should analyze award patterns, program equality, and compliance with policy. Review results findings should be sent to the Director, OHCM.
- D. **Directors, BIA and BIE** are responsible for ensuring that appropriate awards and recognition programs are conducted by their respective bureaus, and that awards comply with all applicable laws, policies, and requirements.
- E. **Managers/Supervisors** are responsible for recommending awards and recognition based on merit, and for providing specific examples of demonstrated, documented, high quality performance. Managers/Supervisors ensure that awards are made in an equitable and commensurate manner.

1.6 Standards, Requirements, and Procedures.

Awards and recognition are motivational tools to encourage employees to take an active part in improving government operations by making full use of their skills and ideas.

A. Standards and Requirements.

- 1) Performance-based awards are linked directly to an employee's most recent rating of record and are intended to recognize sustained levels of successful performance over the course of the rating cycle.
- 2) An employee must be rated Fully Successful (Level 3) or higher in order to be eligible for a performance-based rating award. Any employee rated Outstanding (Level 5) *must* be considered for an award as required by 370 DM 430.
- 3) Consistent with 5 CFR § 451.104(h), performance-based awards must be granted in a manner that makes a meaningful distinction based on levels of performance. In other words, an employee who receives an award based on a performance rating of Outstanding (Level 5) must receive a larger cash award in terms of percentage of base pay, than an employee at the same grade/pay level who received a rating of Fully Successful (Level 3) or Exceeds Expectations (Level 4).
- 4) Regulations provide for four types of performance-based awards that can be given to federal employees: performance-based cash awards (monetary awards), Quality Step Increase (QSI), Time-Off Awards, and/or other appropriate equivalent recognition. Non-monetary recognition (awards) may also be granted to employees in recognition of their contributions to IA.

B. Rating Levels for Recognition.

Managers/Supervisors have the flexibility to recognize employees using any of the performance-based awards outlined below, or a combination thereof:

- 1) **Outstanding (Level 5)** performance rating – Eligible for one or more of the following:
 - cash award of up to five (5) percent of base pay;
 - QSI;
 - time-off award (not to exceed 40 hours); or
 - other appropriate equivalent recognition.
- 2) **Exceeds Expectations (Level 4)** performance rating – Eligible for the following:
 - cash award of up to three (3) percent of base pay;
 - time-off award (not to exceed 40 hours); and/or
 - other appropriate equivalent recognition.

- 3) **Fully Successful (Level 3)** performance rating – Eligible for the following:
 - cash award of up to one (1) percent of base pay;
 - time-off award (not to exceed 40 hours); and/or
 - other appropriate equivalent recognition.
- 4) **Unacceptable (Level 1)** performance rating – Not eligible for any performance-based award.

C. Types of Performance-based Awards.

- 1) **Performance-based cash award** may be a specific dollar amount or a percentage of the employee's pay (consistent with the limitations explained above). A cash award based on a *specific dollar amount* that is in excess of \$5,000 requires approval of the Assistant Secretary or equivalent. However, when a performance-based cash award is based on a *percentage of pay* instead of a set dollar amount, and is over \$5,000, approval by the Assistant Secretary is *not* required.
- 2) **QSI** is a pay increase that provides *faster than normal* progression from one step of the grade of an employee's position to the next higher step of that grade for permanent General Schedule (GS) employees. To be eligible, the employee must achieve an overall rating of Outstanding (Level 5) as documented on their Employee Performance Appraisal Plan (EPAP) form and display exceptional performance that is expected to continue. In addition, the employee must not have received a QSI within the preceding 52 consecutive calendar weeks.

QSIs are given in addition to regular within-grade increases and will not affect the timing of an employee's next regular within-grade increase, unless the QSI places the employee in step 4 or step 7 of their grade. In these cases, waiting periods are extended an additional 52 weeks (waiting periods are 52 weeks for steps 1-3, 104 weeks for steps 4-6, and 156 weeks for steps 7-9). The time an employee has already waited counts towards the next increase, but they must wait the full period that the new step requires.

- 3) **Time-off award** is an excused absence awarded to an employee without charge to leave. Time-off awards should be granted for an appropriate number of hours commensurate with the employee's contributions. The minimum time-off recognition is one hour; and time-off awards should not exceed 40 hours per event or 80 hours total per year. This limit includes performance-based time-off awards.

Employees normally have the discretion to determine when they will use a time-off award, subject to supervisory approval. However, the immediate supervisor has the authority to schedule the use of the time-off award so that organizational workload is

considered, and productivity is sustained. Therefore, the employee and the immediate supervisor will agree on the use of the time-off award together.

A time-off award must be used while the recipient is employed at the Department. Time-off awards cannot be transferred to another agency upon separation of the employee, and employees are not entitled to receive payment for any unused time-off award hours under any circumstances. These limits apply to all employees.

D. Nomination Process and Processing Timelines for Performance-based Awards.

Performance-based awards may be documented using the EPAP form (DI-3100 for non-supervisory employees; DI-3100S for supervisory employees), or the DOI Recommendation and Approval of Awards Form (DI-451).

Nominees must demonstrate a significant accomplishment(s) that contribute(s) to the quality, efficiency, or economy of government operations. For example, making a contribution that exceeds normal expectations and involves a difficult or important project or assignment; displaying special initiative and skill in completing an assignment or project before the deadline; using initiative and creativity in making improvements in a program or service; or ensuring the mission of the organization is accomplished during a difficult period by successfully completing additional work or a project assignment(s) while sustaining the normal, everyday workload.

All performance-based awards should be input into the Federal Personnel and Payroll System (FPPS) **no later than December 1st** in order to process actions for payout before the end-of-calendar year holidays.

E. Other Types of Awards.

- 1) **Special Thanks for Achieving Results (STAR) Award** is a monetary award of \$50 or more (gross amount). The amount of the award should be commensurate with the value of the individual or team accomplishment, considering the overall benefit to the government, and should be consistent with the criteria in Attachment 1. Examples of situations for which it would be appropriate to give an employee a STAR Award include: producing exceptionally high quality work under tight deadlines; performing additional or emergency assignments along with an employee's regular duties; or exercising extraordinary initiative or creativity in addressing a critical need or difficult problem.

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Only one STAR award may be given for a specific accomplishment. Form DI-451, Award Certification, is used to recommend a STAR award; the justification must reflect the employee's accomplishment(s) and be personalized and specific to the employee.

An employee's immediate supervisor normally initiates an award nomination; however, an award can be recommended by an authorized official outside the employee's chain of command who is knowledgeable of or benefited from the employee's contribution(s). If someone other than the employee's immediate supervisor initiates the nomination, the Award Certification must be submitted to the proposed recipient's supervisor for concurrence before the award can be processed for payment. Under no circumstances will an award nomination be processed without the concurrence of the individual's immediate supervisor. STAR awards are paid by the office recommending the award.

- 2) **Non-monetary award/recognition** items include, but are not limited to, nominal value items such as lapel pins, coffee cups, key chains, pens, paperweights, pen and pencil sets, clocks, plaques, jackets, caps, t-shirts, watches, or other similar items that can be of use in the employee's work environment. In general, the cash value of a non-monetary award item may not exceed \$100. Where appropriate, a non-monetary award item should contain the bureau or DOI name, logo, award title, and/or mission.

There is no limit on how many non-monetary awards an employee can receive in a FY. However, supervisors should avoid granting non-monetary awards and presenting award items several times throughout the FY to avoid any possibility of abuse in granting awards. Items for non-monetary recognition should be purchased through normal procurement channels. As appropriate, bureaus/offices should order and have readily available sufficient quantities of non-monetary award items to maximize cost savings.

Non-monetary awards that exceed \$100 in cash value may be given to employees only with the approval of the Bureau Director or equivalent Office Head (or designee). Per DOI policy, bureaus/offices must also consult with the Office of the Solicitor and their bureau/office Procurement Chief (or equivalent) to determine the appropriateness of non-monetary awards that exceed \$100 in cash value. Items that exceed the \$100 cash value threshold must:

- a. be something that the recipient could reasonably be expected to value, but not something that conveys a sense of monetary value;
- b. have lasting trophy value (e.g., an employee can show the item to coworkers and friends as a "trophy" given in appreciation of good work); and

c. clearly symbolize the employer-employee relationship in some fashion.

Bureaus/offices are not permitted to use gift cards or other items that can be easily converted to cash (e.g., gift certificates, U.S. Savings Bonds, tickets to events, or similar items) as non-monetary recognition.

- 3) **Length of Service award** is a form of recognition to honor employees at various milestones in their careers. Consistent with DOI policy, employees may be recognized for career service with an award certificate and emblem at five-year intervals.
- 4) **Productivity Improvement and Invention Patent awards** are addressed in DOI's policy; please refer to 370 DM 451.4 for more information on these awards.

F. Receiving both a Performance-based Award and an Award for a Specific Contribution (i.e., STAR Award) in the Same Year.

In some (though rare) circumstances, an employee may receive *both* an award based on a performance rating of record and an award based on a specific contribution in a single year. In these cases, the value of the accomplishment to the organization is so high that the rating-based award alone would not fully recognize it, and therefore both a rating-based award and a specific contribution award may be warranted.

Supervisors must consider the circumstances carefully and determine whether the accomplishment to be recognized with a specific contribution award was part of the employee's performance plan. Specifically, supervisors should take the following items into consideration:

- 1) If the accomplishment is not included in the performance plan (i.e., an employee's contribution to a special project not related to his/her expected performance), the supervisor should determine whether the accomplishment, **on its own merits**, deserves recognition without regard to the employee's rating-based award.
- 2) If the accomplishment is included in, or related to, the employee's performance plan, it is more appropriate to grant a rating-based award, which recognizes the employee's overall performance (unless the extent of the accomplishment's value to the organization is determined to warrant further recognition).

Supervisors must ensure they comply with all applicable requirements, including OPM approval of awards over \$10,000 for a single accomplishment.

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1.7 Limitations and Prohibitions.

The granting of an award, failure to grant an award, the amount of a monetary award, the receipt of or failure to receive a QSI, or the receipt of or failure to receive any other type of discretionary award are a management prerogative and are not subject to administrative grievance procedures.

There are prohibitions on awards for certain federal employees, such as political employees (Schedule C and non-career SES members) who are not eligible to receive awards between June 1 of any year in which there is a Presidential election and January 20 of the following year (see 5 CFR § 451.105).

1.8 Forms.

All “DI” forms referenced herein are located on the DOI website here (click on “Official Files for Production”): <https://www.doi.gov/eforms>.

While the EPAP forms (DI-3100 and DI-3100S) are available through the DOI website, employees and supervisors should complete these using DOI’s performance management system; which, as of FY 24, is OPM’s USA Performance system. In situations where an exception is required so that a paper form can be used, an employee and supervisor should work together in coordination with their HRO support staff to complete the annual performance plan requirements.

Approval

JASON
FREIHAGE

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Jason Freihage
Deputy Assistant Secretary – Management (DAS-M)

Date

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Attachment 1: DOI Scale of Awards Based on Intangible Benefits

Value of Benefit	EXTENT OF APPLICATION		
	Local	Bureau	Department-wide
	Accomplishment affects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one or more field facilities or Central Office organizational elements or staff office, or • a change or correction of a IA/BIA/BIE policy, or procedure, or • a change in the area of technology or automation 	Accomplishment affects: <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 	Accomplishment affects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more than one region or bureau • has impact DOI-wide or beyond.
Moderate. Important change or contribution to an operating principle, practice, procedure or program of limited impact or use.	Up to \$500	Up to \$1,500	Up to \$3,000
Substantial. Significant change, contribution to, or modification of an operating principle, practice, procedure, program, or service to the public.	Up to \$1,500	Up to \$3,000	Up to \$5,000
Exceptional. Major improvement in the quality of a critical product, activity, program, or service to the public. Complete revision or initiation of a major policy or practice that has significant impact on DOI's mission.	Up to \$3,000	Up to \$5,000	Up to \$10,000 Awards more than \$10,000 require OPM approval. Awards more than \$25,000 require Presidential approval after OPM review.