

Awards

Section 1. Introduction

The EPA award program reflects the Agency's commitment to promote continuous improvement in the Agency's performance. It is recognized that the use of both monetary and non-monetary awards has a significant effect on employee morale, motivation and performance. The EPA award program is an incentive program that provides recognition based on employee achievements that contribute to the Agency's mission. The EPA award program is intended to motivate and reward employees to continually strive for excellence. In addition, the program provides for monetary and non-monetary awards for suggestions, inventions and special acts of service or heroism.

Section 2. Authorities

In the administration of all matters covered by this Article, the Union, the Agency and employees shall be governed by 5 C.F.R Parts 451 and 531; EPA Order 3130, this Agreement, and all other applicable policies and procedures.

Section 3. Additional Provisions

Recognition will be granted in accordance with this Agreement, and all other applicable policies and procedures:

- A. EPA Awards Board. The EPA Awards Board shall include representation from AFGE.
- B. If local management elects to establish a local awards board which includes participation of bargaining unit employees, the Union will also be invited to participate and provide input to that board. Management will consider, and may elect to incorporate/accept, the Union's input.
- C. Awards Budgets. At the beginning of each appraisal period or as soon as available, information concerning the amount and allocation of the awards budget will be provided to the union. The Union will also be provided with periodic updates on the expenditure of awards budgets.
- D. Peer Awards. The nominator and nominee must have an established working relationship. The monetary amount will be determined by the recommending/approving official(s).
- E. Employee awards information, including names, award types and dollar amounts will be provided to the Council President and local union presidents on a quarterly basis. Such information will be electronically sortable by organization and location. This data will be

treated by the union in a confidential manner. At least annually, each organization will electronically publish the names of award recipients and the types of awards they received.

Section 4. Quality Step Increases

- A. GENERAL. Quality Step Increases (QSIs) are additional salary step increases granted for continuing high quality performance during a rating period and for expected maintenance of high-quality performance over the next rating period.
- B. ELIGIBILITY. QSIs may be granted only to General Schedule employees who occupy permanent positions and are paid less than the maximum rate of their grade. Agency employees on Intergovernmental Personnel Act assignments are not eligible for QSIs.
- C. RESTRICTIONS. Generally, employees will not receive QSIs for consecutive fiscal year time periods. In rare circumstances when QSIs are recommended for consecutive fiscal year time periods for the same employee, then an additional level of managerial review (generally the next higher-level manager) is required before the QSI can be approved.
- D. RECOMMENDING AND APPROVING OFFICIALS. Generally, the Recommending Official is the immediate supervisor of the employee being recommended for the QSI. Generally, the Approving Official is the next higher supervisor. A supervisor may not be both the approving and the recommending official except in the case of the Administrator, Deputy Administrator, and those officials reporting directly to the Administrator.
- E. CRITERIA. QSIs may be granted to an employee when:
 - 1. the employee's most recent performance rating of record is Distinguished;
 - 2. the recommending official certifies the employee's performance was at a high level of performance during the period covered by the most recent rating; and
 - 3. the recommending official anticipates that the employee's performance during next performance rating period will merit a Distinguished rating and will continue at a high level of performance.
- F. PROCEDURE. A QSI is granted in conjunction with the employee's annual performance appraisal. The justification for the QSI will be initiated by the Recommending Official.
 - 1. The Recommending Official will certify in writing that the employee has:
 - 2. received a rating of Distinguished for the most recent performance rating period;
 - 3. Employee has accomplished assigned work during the most recent rating period which demonstrates high quality performance;
 - 4. It is anticipated that employee will maintain the same high-quality performance during the next performance period; and
 - 5. Has not reached the maximum step in grade.
- G. In the rare circumstance that a QSIs is recommended for an employee in consecutive fiscal year time periods the Recommending Official will provide a specific justification for the consecutive QSIs.

1. The Recommending Official will forward the QSI recommendation to a higher-level manager (generally the next level manager) for consideration.
2. Approving officials (next/higher level manager) will review and approve or disapprove recommendations in writing with a copy to the immediate supervisor.
3. The recommending official will process the necessary documentation (i.e., SF-50) to be filed in the employee's official personnel folder and notify the employee of the pending award.

H. EFFECTIVE DATES. Approved QSIs will be effective as soon as practicable after all approvals have been received.

I. RELATION TO REGULAR WITHIN-GRADE INCREASES. An employee who receives a QSI does not begin a new waiting period to meet the time requirements for a regular within-grade increase. However, if a QSI places an employee in the fourth or seventh step of the grade, the waiting period is extended by 52 weeks from the last within grade increase.

J. Recognition under this program is given to employees without discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, political affiliation, marital status, disability, age or membership or non-membership in a labor organization.

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