



U.S. General Services Administration (GSA)

## **GSA Order: GSA Employee Performance Recognition System**

HRM 9451.2B

Office of Human Resources Management

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### **Purpose:**

This Order issues and transmits the Employee Performance Recognition System (EPRS). This Order provides (1) policy guidance and procedures for linking recognition with employee appraisals, (2) guidance on recognizing employees for achievement of organizational goals and measures; and (3) other types of monetary, non-monetary and time-off awards.

### **Background:**

This Order provides a systematic approach for recognizing employee accomplishments.

### **Applicability:**

1. This Order outlines a method to effectively recognize employee accomplishments for achieving organizational and individual performance goals.
2. EPRS is a critical component of GSA's overall performance management process. This Order contains policies and procedures for operating the award and recognition program for applicable employees within GSA.

This Order applies to all GSA employees with the exception of the following:

1. The Office of Inspector General (OIG), given its independence under the Inspector General Reform Act of 2008 (5 U.S.C. §§ 401-424).
2. The Civilian Board of Contract Appeals, due to its independent authorities.
3. Executive Schedule appointees.
4. Senior Executive Service (SES) members are not eligible for time-off in lieu of monetary awards.
5. Senior Executive Service (SES) members individual performance awards and presidential rank awards are excluded from this Order.
6. Senior Leader (SL) and Scientific or Professional (ST) members individual performance awards are excluded from this Order.
7. Administration policy may also limit recognition eligibility for certain noncareer

members of the SES and those employees in an excepted service position of a confidential or policy-determining character under Schedule C of subpart C of part 213 of Title 5 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). OHRM is available to provide administration of policy.

8. Monetary awards may not be granted under this authority to certain employees during a Presidential election period beginning on June 1 in a calendar year in which the popular election of the President occurs, and ending on January 20 of the following year. This includes employees who are:
  - a. In a SES position and are not a career appointee; or
  - b. In an excepted service position of a confidential or policy-determining character under Schedule C of subpart C of part 213 of Title 5 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR).
9. GSA has no authority to grant any type of monetary or time off award to GSA contractors or contract employees. Contractors or contract employees may receive Certificates of Appreciation.

**Cancellation:**

HRM 9451.2A, GSA Associate (Employee) Performance Recognition System, is canceled.

**Summary of Changes:**

1. Removed references to performance and summary level 2 and level 4.

**Roles and Responsibilities:**

EPRS is to be implemented with the following roles and responsibilities:

1. **The Administrator.** The Administrator is responsible for:
  - a. Setting policy direction for performance management in GSA including EPRS;
  - b. Setting the maximum payable rates for awards; and
  - c. Delegating approval authority for appropriate awards.
2. **Heads of Services and Staff Offices (HSSOs).** HSSOs are responsible for:
  - a. Oversight of the awards program and awards given by the approving officials within their Service or Staff Office;
  - b. Ensuring that periodic reviews are performed of awards given in their organizations;
  - c. Ensuring that awards granted to employees in their organizations are in compliance with this Order;

- d. Ensuring that Service, and Staff Office award programs established locally comply with the standards and dollar limits set forth in this Order;
  - e. Approving or delegating the approval of awards paid from funds within their control;
  - f. Approving the Commendable Service Award and the Head of Service or Staff Office Exceptional Service Award within their Service or Staff Office;
  - g. Delegating approval authority for appropriate awards to supervisors and management officials;
  - h. Recommending employees for the Administrator's Distinguished Service Award, Administrator's Meritorious Service Award, Administrator's Excellence in Performance Award, Administrator's Exceptional Service Award, and for monetary awards that exceed their delegated authority; and
  - i. Approving Quality Step Increases (QSI) for employees within their area of responsibility.
3. **Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO).** OCFO is responsible for:
- a. Issuing budgetary advice and guidance on awards;
  - b. Serving as approver for appropriate awards and use of GSA funds for non-monetary awards; and
  - c. Managing GSA's award budget.
4. **The Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM).** OHRM is responsible for:
- a. Developing and overseeing the policy and implementation of the performance recognition system;
  - b. Approving exceptions to this policy;
  - c. Advising the Administrator on awards submitted for his or her approval;
  - d. Providing technical assistance and advice to HSSOs on the appropriate use of awards;
  - e. Providing advice and guidance to employees on this policy;
  - f. Participating in the development and implementation of a monitoring and evaluation program to measure awards program effectiveness;

- g. Reviewing award justifications and serving as final approver for appropriate awards prior to processing;
  - h. Executing an accountability review of this Order to ensure organizations meet the requirements of this Order. The Accountability Review should be completed according to the standards as directed by the Office of Personnel Management. The review of this Order should also include a review of the Employee Performance Plan and Appraisal System Order; and
  - i. Vetting Nominees for the Administrator Honor Awards.
5. **Office of Administrative Services (OAS).** OAS approves the purchase of tangible items for non-monetary recognition.
6. **Office of the General Counsel (OGC).** OGC is responsible for:
- a. Determining whether the acceptance of the external award is in compliance with applicable statutes and regulations; and
  - b. . Assisting OHRM during the vetting process by providing relevant information for consideration before forwarding the nominee's name to the Administrator for approval.
7. **Office of Civil Rights (OCR).** OCR is responsible for:
- a. Assisting OHRM during the vetting process by providing relevant information for consideration before forwarding the nominee's name to the Administrator for approval.
8. **Managers and Supervisors.** Managers and supervisors, in accordance with the criteria and procedures in this policy and the GSA Delegations of Authority Manual are responsible for:
- a. Approving monetary, time off and honor awards in accordance with this Order and nominating employees for quality step increases (QSI); for such approvals and nominations must provide adequate written justification for the award and the amount, and be appropriately documented;
  - b. Ensuring that when awards are presented before an audience of employees, the group consists of individuals who have regular and frequent work related association with the award recipient(s); and
  - c. Determining the type of award that will be issued to each employee based on eligibility and business needs. Management should also take into consideration the employee's preference when determining the type of award that will be issued.

**Signature**

/S/  
Arron E. Helm  
Chief Human Capital Officer  
Office of Human Resources Management

3/26/26  
Date

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# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 The Employee Performance Recognition System (EPRS)**

1. EPRS provides the opportunity to reward and recognize performance. This Order provides (1) policy guidance and procedures for linking recognition with employee appraisals, (2) guidance on recognizing employees for achievement of organizational goals and measures; and (3) other types of monetary, non-monetary and time off awards.

# **2. References**

## **2.1 Order compliance with federal statutes and regulations**

1. 5 CFR, 5 CFR 451.102 (definitions), 5 CFR 451.104(a)-(c), 5 CFR 451.105, 5 CFR 451.106(b), 5 U.S.C. 4502(b), 5 CFR 451.105, 5 U.S.C. 4508, 5 U.S.C. 4509 and 5 U.S.C. 4503 which governs awards.

# **3. Program Overview**

## **3.1 Purpose**

1. This Order provides the opportunity to reward and recognize performance for achieving challenging outcomes and should be used in conjunction with the GSA Employee Performance Plan and Appraisal System Order. The objective of the GSA Employee Performance Recognition System is to promote the full use of employee skills by linking performance, pay, and awards to individual achievement and GSA accomplishments in a timely and specific manner. EPRS distinguishes between performance awards and pay increases based on the employee's rating of record and special act and honor awards (monetary and non-monetary) for tangible/intangible benefits to the agency. GSA acknowledges the importance of recognizing those employees who make significant contributions to the efficiency and effectiveness of Government operations. Awards must be distributed fairly without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, reprisal or other non-merit factors.

## **3.2 Funding and caps**

1. GSA with concurrence from the Office of the Chief Financial Officer may allocate a budget for awards during each fiscal year. This cap may be reduced or adjusted as directed by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and/or other appropriate federal government agencies

with the authority. This provides a consistent budget across the agency for all monetary awards including individual performance awards, organizational performance awards, special act awards, and costs associated with non-monetary recognition. Award leave is not included in the cap. This includes:

a. Awards issued by any GSA Service or Staff Office to an employee in another Service or Staff Office should be done in consultation with the employee's supervisor. Monetary and time off awards usually require two levels of management approval or the highest applicable approver. HSSOs have final approval for appropriate award amounts. Awards shall be paid with funds under control of the issuing official; and

b. Any other non-monetary awards established by a Service or Staff Office.

2. The budget is determined by the salaries as of the end of the prior fiscal year (September 30).

3. The budget allocations and distribution stated above are for budgetary allocation and do not provide for actual disbursement. Awards funding for both individuals and organizations, is based on achieving successful performance. Once budgets are issued, the distribution of awards to both individual employees and organizations is contingent on meeting the goals and objectives outlined in organizational or individual performance plans; if an individual or organization does not meet its performance measures, they do not receive the awards.

4. Quality step increases will be budgeted based on the maximum allowable number of instances that can be issued during the fiscal year as determined by OCFO.

5. Heads of Service and Staff Offices may approve individual cash awards for employees or group cash awards up to \$5000, provided no member of the group receives more than \$5,000. With the exception of individual performance awards, single awards over \$5,000 must have the approval of the Administrator or Deputy Administrator (or Acting Administrator or Deputy Administrator if the positions are vacant). There are no exceptions. The maximum single cash award across all award types that can be granted without review and approval from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is \$10,000. OPM can approve awards over \$10,000 up to \$25,000. The President must approve any award over \$25,000. Under no circumstance should the awards caps be avoided by splitting the amounts.

6. The total calendar year aggregate for all monetary awards per employee is not to exceed the limitation on aggregate compensation set by 5 CFR 530.202 which is equal to the rate for level I of the Executive Schedule in effect at the end of the applicable calendar year. The cap includes monetary individual performance awards, organizational performance awards, special act awards, and quality step increases (QSI) annualized for the calendar year.

## **4. Cash, Time off and Step Increases**

### **4.1 Individual Performance Awards (IPA)**

1. Individual Performance Awards are linked directly to the most recent annual rating of record. In lieu of a monetary award an employee may express a preference for and management may grant time off. Management retains the authority to grant a time off award in lieu of a monetary award. Award issuances will be cash or time off, but not a combination of both. Only one cash or time off IPA can be issued to an employee in a fiscal year.

2. Individual Performance Award Caps.

a. Maximum individual performance award is 10% of an employee's annual rate of basic pay.

b. The Administrator may authorize an award exceeding 10% if the performance justifies the award. No individual performance award may exceed 20% of the employee's annual rate of basic pay.

c. IPA awards over \$5,000 do not require Administrator or Deputy Administrator approval.

d. IPA awards over \$10,000 require OPM approval.

3. Employees with a Level 3 or Level 5 rating of record are eligible for awards linked directly to their performance appraisal.

4. If the employee receives a GSA performance annual rating of record of Level 5 and the conditions are met in section 4.2, the employee may also be considered for a Quality Step Increase (QSI) during the fiscal year.

5. OHRM and OCFO must approve IPAs prior to issuance. Reference Appendix A for required approvals.

6. Employees are eligible to receive individual cash or time off performance awards provided they are employed by GSA as of the end of the fiscal year (September 30) and are issued an eligible rating of record.

7. IPAs processed en masse GSA-wide do not require a Form 1291. Awards that are requested outside of this cycle, and corrections to awards previously issued require supervisor and manager approval or appropriate designee with the use of Form 1291. HSSO or designee has final authority within their organization for applicable awards.

## 4.2 Quality Step Increase (QSI)

1. Purpose. A QSI is a pay action under 5 U.S.C. Chapter 53 and as such is affected with an official personnel action. Only employees in the general schedule are eligible for QSIs. A QSI is an increase in an employee's rate of basic pay from one step of his or her grade to the next higher step of that grade.

2. The purpose of the QSI is to recognize outstanding individual performance by granting faster than normal advancement in base pay. Management may authorize a QSI for those employees whose current annual rating of record is Level 5 and where the exemplary performance can be expected to continue during the performance year. Employees who receive cash or time off performance awards may also be considered for a Quality Step Increase (QSI) during the performance year. Unlike other forms of monetary recognition, a QSI permanently increases an employee's rate of basic pay by one step.

### 3. Limitations.

- a. An employee may not receive more than one QSI in the same 52 consecutive calendar week period;
- b. An employee must have been performing at the grade level for a minimum of six months and have demonstrated sustained high quality performance;
- c. A QSI must be approved by the HSSO or designee;
- d. The employee must occupy a "permanent appointment" in the general schedule. Term and temporary employees are excluded from QSIs;
- e. The employee must be at step 9 or below of their grade level;
- f. The effective date of a QSI is the pay period following approval by OHRM and OCFO, it cannot be applied retroactively; and
- g. The employee's most recent annual rating of record must be Level 5.

4. Justification and submission. QSIs will be processed with an approved EPPAS rating and Form 1291. In addition to the appraisal form, it must include a written justification that incorporates (a) a statement that the employee is expected to remain at the same grade level and the same or similar position for at least 60 days; (b) a statement that the same or higher level of performance is expected to continue.

### **4.3 Within-Grade Increase**

1. Chapter 53 of Title 5, USC, authorizes within-grade step increases after certain waiting periods at various steps, provided that the employee has demonstrated an acceptable level of competence. Under EPPAS, a Level 3 and above rating of record is indicative of acceptable performance.

### **4.4 Organizational Performance Awards (OPA)**

1. GSA encourages recognizing the contributions and accomplishments of GSA, Services and Staff Offices. OPAs are based on GSA, Services or Staff Offices and/or team goals and measures. Awards should be tied to GSA and/or Service or Staff Office strategic objectives. They are used to reward groups of employees for meeting or exceeding performance measures. Management may authorize time off in lieu of a comparable monetary award. Award issuances will be cash or time off, but not a combination of both.

#### **a. Organizational Performance Awards.**

(1) Services and Staff Offices at their discretion may use organizational awards to support mission and goals. Organizational awards should be tied to GSA's strategic objectives and the Service or Staff Office goals. Goals, measures and time frames must be established and communicated prior to issuing the award.

#### **2. Eligibility.**

a. Employees are eligible to receive OPAs cash or time off provided they were employed by GSA as of the established period of performance end date.

b. Employees with a current summary rating of Level 1 are not eligible for an OPA.

3. A written justification is required. Reference Appendix B for determining appropriate award amounts and required approvals. Heads of Service and Staff Offices may approve cash awards for employees up to \$5,000. OPAs over \$5,000 must have the approval of the Administrator or Deputy Administrator (or acting Administrator or Deputy Administrator if the positions are vacant). OHRM and OCFO must approve OPAs prior to issuance.

4. OPAs processed en masse GSA-wide do not require the Form 1291. Awards that are requested outside of this cycle, and corrections to awards previously issued require supervisor and manager approval or appropriate designee with the use of Form 1291. HSSO or designee has final authority within their organization for applicable awards.

## 4.5 Special Act Awards (SAA)

1. Special Act Awards are individual awards based on nonrecurring contributions either within or outside job responsibilities. SAAs recognize specific accomplishments timely that are in the public interest that clearly exceed normal job requirements such as achieving challenging performance outcomes or courageous handling of an emergency situation related to official employment. At management's discretion, in lieu of a monetary award an employee may be granted time off. Award issuances will be cash or time off, but not a combination of both.

2. Employees who receive a Special Act Award may be given monetary or honorary recognition for their contributions to the Government. Contributions which can be recognized are: "suggestions, inventions, or special acts or services in the public interest connected with or related to official employment, which contribute to the efficiency, economy, or other improvement of Government operations."

3. A performance rating is not used to justify this award; however, a written justification is required. OHRM and OCFO must approve special acts prior to issuance. Reference Appendix B for determining appropriate award amounts and required approvals. Heads of Service and Staff Offices may approve cash awards for employees up to \$5,000. Special Act awards over \$5,000 must have the approval of the Administrator or Deputy Administrator.

4. The justification must be processed using the Form 1291 and should correspond to the value of the contribution. Follow the steps listed below to determine the amount of the award:

a. Describe how the accomplishment was special in terms of time saved, cost saved, unexpected difficulties overcome, greater quality, and/or better results achieved.

b. Estimate the tangible and/or intangible benefits of the accomplishment for which the award is being generated.

c. If a group award, divide the amount of the award among the members of the group and document each individual's contribution. If the award is not divided equally, explain how the different shares were determined.

5. When an official wishes to recognize an employee that is serving on a detail assignment to their unit or works in another organization the official must contact the employee's current supervisor and receive his/her concurrence before processing the award. The supervisor should review the award to ensure the amount is appropriate for the contribution and that the employee is not being awarded twice for the same act. The narrative for the justification of the award must include the name of the supervisor and date of concurrence with the action.

6. Awards shall be paid from funds under control of the issuing official.

7. Special Act Awards may be given to employees of other government agencies or to GSA employees by other Government agencies. Monetary or time off awards may not be given to contractors however contractors may receive Certificates of Appreciation.

a. An award shall not be approved for an employee of another agency without the concurrence of his or her employing agency.

b. A recommendation for a Special Act Award to be paid by GSA to an employee of another agency must be processed in the same way and in accordance with the same standards that would apply for an award to a GSA employee. This can be done in writing (letter, memo or e-mail) or verbally. If verbal concurrence is given, the recommending official shall note that in the documentation for the award. After concurrence has been received, the approving official must complete the award with the use of Form 1291.

c. When another agency requests GSA concurrence on an award to a GSA employee, the request shall be referred to the GSA official who has authority to approve GSA monetary awards for that employee. At his or her discretion, the approving official may:

(1) Concur in the recommended award or in a modified award;

(2) Ask that the recommendation be canceled in favor of GSA furnishing an award; or

(3) Ask that the award recommendation be canceled on grounds that:

(a) The employee's achievement is not significant enough to warrant special recognition;

(b) The employee has already received recognition for his/her achievement; or

(c) Reject the award. If the supervisor is aware the employee is the subject to pending management inquiry or Inspector General investigation, or disciplinary action or proposed disciplinary action. This detailed private information about an employee is not to be disclosed to the requesting agency.

(4) When a GSA employee is given an award by another agency or an employee of another agency is given an award by GSA, the awarding and the employing agency should both be represented at the presentation.

8. All special act awards require supervisor and manager approval or appropriate designee approval. HSSO or designee has final authority within their organization.

## **4.6 Time off awards**

1. Time off awards are the granting of excused absence from the office without charge to leave or loss of pay to an employee in lieu of a monetary award for a special act award, individual performance award, or as a member of a group for an organizational performance award. There is a maximum number of 120 hours permitted for time off in a fiscal year and office productivity should be considered. A time off award is calculated by dividing the proposed monetary award amount by the employee's hourly rate of basic pay. Time off may not be converted to cash. Time off awards must be used within one year of the effective date. Unused time is not eligible for restoration, and is not included in any lump sum payment for accrued leave upon separation. The employee's supervisor will make the determination when the appropriate business conditions exist that will permit the employee to utilize the time off award, however, it is necessary that the opportunity is provided to the employee within one year after its issuance. Time off awards are not transferable from other agencies to GSA. Time off awards issued by GSA are transferable to other agencies upon request. If an employee transfers from one agency to another, the gaining agency is not obligated to "honor" the time off award. The written justification for the time off compensation must be based solely on individual or organizational performance, or special act, and shall not be used to compensate or reward employees for working outside of the basic workweek or in lieu of premium pay, such as overtime.

## **5. Non-monetary and honorary awards**

### **5.1 Non-monetary awards**

1. Non-monetary awards are awards intended to recognize contributions that might otherwise go unrecognized. While these awards are non-monetary to the employee, there are costs associated with GSA. Total cost of these awards is to be monitored, as they are included within the total awards budget.

As with any other award, these awards must be justified by some superior achievement or accomplishment, and supervisors must maintain documentation of the awards. Such documentation should include the name of the award recipient, date of issuance, and a brief description of the contribution being recognized. Non-monetary items presented as informal recognition awards must meet the following criteria:

- a. The item must be of nominal value not to exceed \$99.00;
- b. The item must demonstrate good taste and preserve the credibility and integrity of GSA's awards program. Items must convey recognition for superior achievement. Items must not be of a partisan political nature, and must not be of a nature that would bring discredit or embarrassment to GSA or the recipient; and

c. Appropriate non-monetary award items can be electronic or displayed in an office setting or worn by the award recipient and typically bear the GSA logo or other GSA insignia or designs. Examples of acceptable non-monetary awards are certificates, plaques, and pins.

d. Gift cards are not permitted using GSA/appropriated funds.

2. Any official or employee who is aware of the relevant facts may recommend an individual for one of the awards below. The submission shall describe the performance and include proposed wording for the citation. Recommendations shall be in writing and forwarded through the first and second supervisor to the Head of Service or Staff Office or designee for approval and issuance.

a. Public Service Award. The Public Service Award is a certificate that may be used to recognize either GSA employees who make notable contributions to the public welfare in activities not related to their official employment or employees of other agencies or private citizens who perform significant acts or services in the public interest related to program areas for which GSA has responsibility. While it is not practical to identify all the types of contributions that would merit this award, the following examples will serve as a guide:

(1) Distinguished leadership in community projects to aid underprivileged groups;

(2) Outstanding service in successful fund-raising drives for worthy causes;

(3) Heroic action in an emergency involving great personal risk;

(4) Exceptional accomplishment or dedicated service in the field of civil rights, public education, health, welfare, or permissible nonpartisan local government;

(5) Unusual contribution to artistic or scientific progress;

(6) Noteworthy contribution of time, energy, and ability to a program devoted to social progress or civil betterment.

b. Commendable Service Award. The Commendable Service Award is a certificate that is used to provide recognition for superior work-related achievement when such achievement is worthy of a high honorary award but is not so significant that it meets the standards for the Distinguished Service Award or the Meritorious Service Award.

c. Certificates of Performance Achievement. These certificates are given to employees or groups of employees for significant acts, services, or achievements that materially aid or affect the successful accomplishment of the agency's mission. Supervisors and managers can approve this award upon receipt of the proposal

memorandum and supporting documentation.

d. Official Letters of Commendation. These are written and normally presented by immediate supervisors for high quality performance of official duties such as extra effort, consistent devotion to duty, or above average contribution on a project or high profile assignment. Supervisors may also award these letters to recognize special contributions by employees in other organizations.

e. Non-GSA or External Awards. There are a number of awards sponsored throughout the year by other Federal agencies or outside organizations for which GSA is asked to nominate candidates. As GSA receives award invitations, announcements will be provided of Non-GSA awards to solicit additional means of recognizing outstanding employees deserving of recognition. All external awards require prior OGC approval to ensure accordance with 5 CFR 2635.204(d)(1).

f. Career Service Certificate. Each employee, upon completion of 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, or 50 years of Federal service can be recognized. The award may consist of a lapel button or pin, certificate signed by the Head of the Service or Staff Office or his or her designee or another appropriate form of recognition as determined by the Service or Staff Office. All Federal service, including honorable military service, will be used to determine eligibility for Career Service Awards. The awards will normally be presented the month following attainment of the required length of service.

g. Certificate of Retirement. May be given to an employee at the time of departure from GSA due to retirement in recognition of a record of service to GSA. The award will normally be presented prior to the employee's separation due to the retirement.

3. Frequency of non-monetary awards. There is no limit on the number of non-monetary awards given to one employee.

4. Presentation of non-monetary awards. Particular care should be taken to provide an appropriate presentation of the award.

5. Approved Non-Monetary Recognition Programs. Services and Staff Offices at their discretion may establish non-monetary recognition awards for their organization.

a. The following must be addressed:

- (1) Description of the program;
- (2) Criteria for receiving the recognition;
- (3) The type of non-monetary recognition that will be issued;
- (4) The nomination and approval process for receiving, reviewing

applications and documenting the requirements for the recognition;

- (5) Eligible employees;
- (6) Resources required for the implementation; and
- (7) Evaluation method for program compliance.

b. Proposed non-monetary programs will be reviewed by:

- (1) OHRM – approve program for policy compliance and address other applicable requirements;
- (2) OCFO – approve required funding for the program;
- (3) OGC – approve program for legal compliance;
- (4) OAS – approve the use and purchase of tangible items as awards; and
- (5) HSSO – approve implementation of the program.

## **5.2 Honor awards**

1. Honor awards have a special or prestigious value distinct from monetary awards recognizing aggregate achievements over a major part of an employee's career or an extraordinary event.

a. General.

(1) Honor awards have special or prestigious value distinct from monetary awards. The levels of awards provided for in this Order make it possible to recognize accomplishments of widely varying significance and scope.

(2) When a person risks his or her life to save others from death or serious injury or to save valuable property, a high honor award is the appropriate form of recognition, but an accompanying monetary or time off award could afford the recipient added satisfaction and should be considered.

(3) Officials, supervisors, and approving officials should consider each case in the light of all the circumstances to decide whether an honor award alone, a monetary or time off award alone, or both, would be most suitable.

2. Administrator's Honor Awards.

a. Administrator's Distinguished Service Award. This is the highest award within the authority of the Administrator of the General Services Administration. It may

be given to recognize:

(1) An extraordinary accomplishment, or record of service that has demonstrated the highest qualities of efficiency, ingenuity, and/or integrity and has made a major improvement in the effectiveness or image of GSA in one or more program areas; or

(2) Heroic action related to official employment taken to save persons or property at great personal risk.

(3) An employee would normally receive the meritorious service award before being nominated for the distinguished service award.

b. Administrator's Meritorious Service Award. This is the second highest award within the authority of the Administrator of General Services Administration. The distinction between a Meritorious Service Award and the Distinguished Service Award is the magnitude of the effect of the individual's record of service and accomplishments in GSA and the Federal service. It may be given to recognize:

(1) A highly superior accomplishment, or record of service that has demonstrated notable efficiency, ingenuity, diligence, and/or integrity and has made a significant improvement in the effectiveness or image of GSA in one or more program areas; or

(2) Action related to official employment and requiring outstanding competence to save personal life or property in an emergency.

c. The Administrator's Excellence in Performance Award. The Administrator's Excellence in Performance Award recognizes contributions to the agency's efforts to link GSA strategic goals and business goals, the budget, employee's performance expectations and measurable performance targets.

d. Nominations. The Chief Human Capital Officer will issue an invitation for nominations for the Administrator's Distinguished Service Award, Administrator's Meritorious Service Award, and Administrator's Excellence in Performance Award at a time agreeable to the Administrator. The invitation will specify the deadline for receipt of nominations. Nominations for the Administrator's Distinguished Service, Administrator's Meritorious Service and Administrator's Excellence in Performance Award will not be accepted outside of the dates of the invitation to ensure the entire agency will have an opportunity to participate.

e. The Administrator's Exceptional Service Award. The Administrator's Exceptional Service Award may be given to an employee at the time of departure from GSA due to retirement, resignation, or transfer in recognition of a record of service to GSA that is unusual for its impact on one or more GSA programs, or for diligence, steadfastness, or dedication.

(1) Nominations for the Administrator's Exceptional Service Award are presented to the Head of Service or Staff Office or designee for endorsement, before forwarding on to the Chief Human Capital Officer or designee for concurrence, prior to the Administrator's approval.

(2) The Form 1291 is used to submit this award; however, nominations shall be submitted through the HSSO as appropriate, and forwarded to the Chief Human Capital Officer to secure the Administrator's approval, with the following information:

(a) Name of the employee as it should appear on the certificate if the award is approved;

(b) Title and grade of employee;

(c) Organizational location and duty station;

(d) Citation; and

(e) Detailed description of the achievement that is the basis for the commendation, including a comparison of the employee's performance as it stands out in comparison with other employees in the same position and/or circumstance.

2. Honor Awards from the Head of Service or Staff Office. Each Head of Service or Staff Office or designee has authority to grant an Exceptional Service Award within their organization. This award may be given to an employee at the time of departure from GSA due to retirement, resignation, or transfer in recognition of a record of service to GSA that is unusual for its impact on one or more GSA programs, or for diligence, steadfastness, or dedication. Authority for this award rests with the Head of Service or Staff Office.

a. Nominations for this Exceptional Service Award require the approval of the Head of Service or Staff Office.

b. Each Head of Service or Staff Office shall establish the process for the submission, creation, and issuance of this GSA Exceptional Service Award within their organization.

c. Form 1291 can be used to submit this award; however, nominations shall be submitted to the HSSO as appropriate:

(1) Name of the employee as it should appear on the certificate if the award is approved;

(2) Title and grade of employee;

(3) Organizational location and duty station;

(4) Citation; and

(5) Detailed description of the achievement that is the basis for the commendation, including a comparison of the employee's performance as it stands out in comparison with other employees in the same position and/or circumstance.

3. Frequency of honor awards. There is no limit on the number of honor awards given to one employee.

4. Presentation of honor awards. Because of the high prestige value and the relative infrequency of honor awards, particular care should be taken to provide an appropriate presentation of the award. Each Service or Staff Office should hold an appropriate ceremony to honor recipients of the major honor awards.

## **6. Submission of awards recommendations**

1. Monetary and time off awards, and quality step increases, are to be processed in an approved human resources information technology system. Form 1291, or an approved electronic equivalent, will be used to document award justifications. All awards must receive approval from the designated officials in accordance with this Order.

2. Submission of Honor Award nominations is covered in Section 5.2 of this Order.

3. A single Form 1291 or an approved electronic system that documents the appropriate requirements may be used for nominations of large groups of employees. Awards submitted en masse must contain the following information for each employee:

(a) Award justification for each employee; and

(b) Applicable approvals are secured prior to processing.

4. Awards processed en masse GSA-wide for most employees do not require the Form 1291. Upon receipt of the authorization of the award OHRM and OCFO will review and process awards to ensure compliance with this Order. The OHRM Performance Manager will maintain documentation supporting the awards issuance.

5. If an employee is the subject of a pending management inquiry or Inspector General investigation, or the subject of a disciplinary action or proposed disciplinary action, the Agency shall not issue an award to the employee that would otherwise have been granted within the performance year. If, upon the conclusion of the inquiry, investigation or proposed disciplinary action, the employee is not issued a disciplinary action, the Agency may grant the precluded award to the employee.

## **7. Awards as a factor in promotions**

1. In accordance with 5 CFR 451.106 agencies “shall give due weight to an award granted under this part in qualifying and selecting an employee for promotion as provided in 5 U.S.C. 3362.” GSA officials who participate in the selection of employees for promotion should note any evidence of awards included in the employee’s application and consider this information along with other pertinent data when making a final selection.

## **8. Presentation of awards**

1. To achieve the best incentive impact from awards, the following guidelines should be followed.

a. Awards should be recommended, approved, and presented as quickly as feasible after the contribution is made or the rating of record is approved.

b. Once a determination to issue an award has been made, managers and supervisors should check with the employee on their award preference – some prefer cash, while others may prefer time off.

c. The witnesses to the presentation should have an understanding and appreciation of the basis for the award. The person who makes the award presentation should have a sufficiently detailed understanding of the significance or difficulty of the accomplishment to speak about it extemporaneously.

d. Nothing in this section is meant to exclude friends of the awardee, or family members, at an award presentation.

e. Frequent brief ceremonies are preferable to infrequent, lengthy ceremonies.

f. Presentation of the major Honor Awards should be scheduled to permit attendance by the Administrator or a designee.

g. Frequent publishing of GSA employees who have received awards is encouraged.

## **9. Awards for summer employees and other temporary employees**

1. With the exception of individual performance awards directly linked to the performance appraisal, summer employees and other temporary employees are eligible

to receive awards in accordance with the same criteria applied to contributions by other employees.

## **10. Grievances and appeals**

1. Employees may not appeal or grieve decisions to grant or not to grant monetary or non-monetary recognition or amounts of recognition.

## **11. Record keeping**

1. Documentation and records will be maintained as follows:

a. Award records and related documents will be maintained in accordance with provisions of the Privacy Act, Freedom of Information Act, Office of Personnel Management, National Archives General Schedule and other statutory and regulatory requirements.

b. Electronic signatures and forms as appropriate can be used to support the implementation of this Order.

## Appendix A. Award Amounts & Approvals for Performance Awards (IPA) & Quality Step Increase (QSI)

Award Type	1st level Supervisor	2nd level Supervisor	HSSO	Administrator	OPM
IPA cash up to 10% or up to \$10,000	X	X			
IPA cash above \$10,000	X	X	X	X	X
IPA time off up to 120 Hours	X	X			
Quality Step Increase	X	X	X		
*Award percentages above 10% to 20% of salary will require Administrator approval.					

## Appendix B. Award Amounts & Approvals for Special Act Awards (SAA) & Organizational Performance Awards (OPA)

Award Value	Eligibility Requirements	Time Off	Cash	Approval Level
<b>Moderate</b>	<p>An accomplishment that has aided in meeting organizational goals; deserving of recognition because the employee has exceeded normal performance expectations. Impact: limited to an office or part of an organization. Excels in customer service or performs a change or modification of an operating principle or procedure resulting in improvement of a product, activity, program, or service. Comparable to a tangible benefit cost savings from \$250 to \$4,999.*</p> <p><b><i>Examples of worthy performance, but not limited to are:</i></b></p> <p>(1) making a high-quality contribution to a difficult or important project or assignment;</p> <p>(2) producing exceptionally high quality work under a tight deadline;</p> <p>(3) performing added or emergency assignments in addition to regular duties.</p>	8 to 16 hours.	\$250 to \$1000	<p><b>All Offices Final Approver:</b> First and Second Level Supervisor</p> <p><b>Approvers:</b> Servicing OHRM, OCFO Office</p>
<b>Substantial</b>	<p>An accomplishment that substantially contributes to exceeding operational goals or results in major changes to policies or practices across Service or Staff Office lines, or significantly advances multiple agency objectives. Exceeds expectations in customer service or performs a change or modification of an operating principle or procedure resulting in a substantial improvement of a product, activity, program, or service. Comparable to a tangible benefit cost savings from \$5,000 to \$99,999.</p> <p><b><i>Examples of worthy performance, but not limited to are:</i></b></p>	17 to 40 hours	\$1001 to \$2,500	<p><b>All Offices:</b> First and Second Level Supervisor</p> <p><b>Final Approver Services Only:</b> Assistant Commissioner</p> <p><b>Final Approver Staff Offices Only:</b> HSSO</p>

	(1) demonstrating exceptional courtesy or responsiveness in dealing with the public, client agencies, or colleagues; (2) exercising extraordinary initiative or creativity in addressing a critical need or difficult problem; (3) performance of assigned duties with special effort or innovation that results in increased productivity.			<b>Approvers:</b> OCFO Office of Budget and Servicing HR Office
<b>High Value</b>	An accomplishment that has substantially contributed to exceeding organizational goals or that affects a total change in policies or procedures that cross Service or Staff Office lines and/or is exceptional in advancing multiple objectives. Impact: Service or Staff Office(s)-wide or agency-wide. Achieves excellence in customer service or completes revision of a basic principle or procedure resulting in a major improvement of a product, activity, program, or service. Comparable to a tangible benefit from \$100,000 to \$999,999. <b>Examples of worthy performance, but not limited to are:</b> (1) performance of assigned duties with special effort or innovation that results in increased productivity, economy, or other highly desirable benefits; (2) performance which has involved overcoming unusual difficulties; (3) develop and implement a new policy/program/service that improves region-wide services.	41 to 120 hours	\$2,501 to \$5,000	<b>All Offices:</b> First and Second Level Supervisor  <b>Final Approvers Services Only:</b> Assistant Commissioner  <b>Final Approvers Staff Offices Only:</b> HSSO  <b>Approvers:</b> OCFO Office of Budget and Servicing HR Office
<b>Exceptional Value</b>	An achievement characterized by the initiation of innovative policies or procedures and substantial promotion of Agency goals. Impact: Government-wide, and Partnerships with the Private Sector. Initiation of a new principle or major procedure resulting in an unusually significant improvement in a product, activity, program, or service. Comparable to a tangible benefit from \$1,000,000 to \$7,000,000.		\$5,001 to \$10,000	<b>All Offices:</b> First and Second Level Supervisor HSSO  <b>Final Approver:</b> Administrator or Deputy Administrator

	<p><b>Examples of worthy performance, but not limited to are:</b></p> <p>(1) exemplary or courageous handling of an emergency situation related to official employment.</p> <p>(2) develop and implement a new policy/program/service that improves government-wide services within appropriate benefit from \$1,000,00 to \$7,000,000</p>			<p><b>Approvers:</b> OCFO Office of Budget and Servicing HR Office</p>
<p><b>Extraordinary Value</b></p>	<p>A rare level of achievement characterized by the initiation of innovative policies or procedures and substantial promotion of Agency and Government-wide goals. Impact: Government-wide, and Partnerships with the Private Sector. Initiation of a new principle or major procedure resulting in an unusually significant improvement in a product, activity, program, or service. Comparable to a tangible benefit from \$7,000,000 and above*</p> <p><b>Examples of worthy performance, but not limited to are:</b></p> <p>(1) exemplary or courageous handling of an emergency situation related to official employment.</p> <p>(2) develop and implement a new policy/program/service that improves government-wide services appropriate benefit from \$7,000,000 and above*</p>		<p>Above \$10,000</p>	<p><b>All Offices:</b> First and Second Level Supervisor HSSO CFO CHCO Administrator or Deputy Administrator</p> <p><b>Final Approvers:</b> OPM</p> <p><b>Approvers:</b> OCFO Office of Budget and Servicing HR Office</p>

# Appendix C. Award Recommendation, GSA FORM 1291

## Employee Information

**Employee Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Employee ID:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Pay Plan, Series and Grade:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Service or Staff Office:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Salary (Base & Locality):** \_\_\_\_\_

## Award Details

Type of Award		Period of Recognition
Individual Performance Award (IPA) (Cash, Time Off)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Month/Year to Month/Year
Special Act Award (Cash or Time Off)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Effective Date:</b> (Requires HR concurrence)
Organizational Performance Award (OPA) (Group) (Cash, Time Off)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Honor Awards (Administrator or Head of Service or Staff Office)		
Administrators Distinguished Service Award	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Administrators Meritorious Service Award	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Administrators Exceptional Service Award	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Head of Service or Staff Office Exceptional Service Award	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Quality Step Increase	<input type="checkbox"/>	From Step to Step

Award Justification (Required for all awards)	(brief justification)
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**Award amount**

Type	Amount
Cash	Dollars *Awards above \$5,000 require Administrator approval except IPA's \$
Time off	Hours:
Appropriation Code	

**Award approvals**

First Level Supervisor	Print Name:	Signature:	Date:
Second Level Supervisor	Print Name:	Signature:	Date:
3 <sup>rd</sup> Level Official (as required)	Print Name:	Signature:	Date:
4 <sup>th</sup> level Official (as required)	Print Name:	Signature:	Date:
5 <sup>th</sup> level Official (as required)	Print Name:	Signature:	Date:
6 <sup>th</sup> level Official (as required)	Print Name:	Signature:	Date:
7 <sup>th</sup> level Official (as required)	Print Name:	Signature:	Date:
8 <sup>th</sup> level Official (as required)	Print Name:	Signature:	Date:
Administrator or Deputy Administrator (as required)	Print Name:	Signature:	Date:
OCFO Budget Official	Print Name:	Signature:	Date:
OHRM Human Resources Official	Print Name:	Signature:	Date:

## Appendix D. Definitions

- a. Appraisal. This is the process under which performance is reviewed and evaluated.
- b. Appraisal period. The established period of time for which performance will be evaluated and a rating of record will be prepared.
- c. Basic Pay. The rate of pay fixed by law or administrative action for the position held by a GS employee before any deductions, including a GS rate, an LEO special base rate, a special rate, a locality rate, and a retained rate, but exclusive of additional pay of any other kind. Refer to 5 CFR 531.203. When granting an award paid as a percentage of basic pay under 5 U.S.C. 4505a(a)(2), must include any applicable locality payment under 5 CFR part 531, subpart F; special rate supplement under 5 CFR part 530, subpart C; or similar payment or supplement under other legal authority. For an employee receiving a retained rate under 5 CFR part 536, subpart C (or similar authority, such as 5 CFR 359.705), the rate of basic pay is the maximum payable rate for the employee's grade or level, rather than the retained rate. Refer to 5 CFR part 451.104 (g).
- d. Employee. As used in this Order refers to all covered employees.
- e. Equivalent Time Off Award. Time off award issued in lieu of a monetary award that has the same value as the monetary award. Equivalent time off equals the original monetary award amount divided by the employee hourly rate of basic pay.
- f. Intangible Benefit. Actual or perceived benefits a customer or organization receives when the employee completes a product, or service.
- g. Manager. The employee's position meets the Civil Service Reform Act definition and occupies a position which meets the labor management definition of supervisor as defined in 5 U.S.C. 7103(a) (10), but does not meet the minimum requirements for application of the General Schedule Supervisory Guide or the position meets the definition of Management Official in 5 U.S.C. 7103(a)(11).
- h. Performance. This is the level of accomplishment of work assignments or responsibilities.
- i. Performance award. This is a performance-based award based on the employee's annual rating of record. A performance award does not increase base pay.
- j. Performance-based actions. As used in this Order personnel actions authorized under 43 of Title 5 to reassign, demote, or remove employees for "unacceptable performance."
- k. Performance plan. This is the written or otherwise recorded electronically,

performance elements that set forth expected performance. A plan must include all of the critical performance elements with at least one critical element and the performance standards.

l. Performance rating. The appraisal of performance compared to the performance expectation(s) for each critical element which there has been an opportunity to perform for the minimum period. A performance rating may include the assignment of a summary rating of all the elements when an employee has served a minimum of 90 calendar days on a plan. A performance summary rating is used for interim appraisals (issued during the performance cycle) and should be considered when issuing an annual rating of record.

m. Performance standard. The management approved performance threshold(s), requirement(s), or expectation(s) that must be met to be appraised at a particular level of performance in an element under 5 CFR 430.203.

n. Permanent appointment. This position is filled by an employee whose appointment is not designated as temporary or term and does not have a definite time limitation.

o. Project leader. An employee whose position does not meet the minimum requirements for coverage under the OPM's General Schedule Leader Grade Evaluation Guide (GSLGEG), however works with team members to achieve specific tasks, produce work products and services and meet program and production goals.

p. Rating official. This is the supervisor or manager of the employee. The rating official is designated to establish performance plans for a position and to evaluate the performance of subordinate employees. The immediate supervisor of each employee will normally be assigned this responsibility.

q. Rating of record. This is the performance rating prepared at the end of the rating period for performance on all the elements in the performance plan over the entire period and the assignment of a summary rating. The rating period is normally 12 months. Transferred ratings of record from another agency can be matched to GSA's planning and appraisal program to support appropriate personnel actions until an employee can be rated under GSA's system.

r. Reviewing official. This is a manager or supervisor at a higher level than the rating official, designated to review the performance plans and ratings of record for one or more subordinate employees. Service and Staff Office Heads may serve as both the rating and reviewing official for employees who report directly to them. The reviewing official approves employees for awards.

s. Signatures. These may either be in hard copy or electronic per OPM guidelines.

t. Summary rating. This is the written record of the appraisal of each element and the assignment of a summary rating level.

u. Supervisor. An employee's position meets the minimum requirements for coverage under the OPM's General Schedule Supervisory Guide (GSSG) and has the authority to direct the work of an organizational unit; be held accountable for the success of specific line or staff functions; monitor and evaluate the progress of the organization toward meeting goals; and make adjustments in objectives, work plans, schedules, and commitment of resources.

v. Tangible Benefit. Actual benefits a customer or organization receives when the employee completes a product, or service that can be quantified, for example, in dollars saved.

w. Team leader. Is an employee whose position meets the minimum requirements for coverage under the OPM's General Schedule Leader Grade Evaluation Guide (GSLGEG) and works with team members to achieve specific tasks, produce work products and services and meet program and production goals.

x. Transfer. An employee of one agency may transfer, without a break in service of a single workday, to a position in another agency.

y. Trial period. It has the same purpose of a probationary period; however, it applies to positions in the excepted service and can last from one to two years. Prior Federal civilian service is credited toward completion of the required trial period in the same manner as prescribed for the competitive service in 5 CFR 315.802.