

NORTHERN PLAINS AREA
Policy Memorandum

DATE:	November 15, 2011
SUBJECT:	Northern Plains Area Award Policy
NUMBER:	PM-08-002
EFFECTIVE DATE:	Immediately Until Replaced or Superseded (Replaces PM-08-002 dated March 14, 2008)

1. Purpose

This document establishes the award policy for the Northern Plains Area.

2. Standard Procedures

- All Extra Effort awards and Performance-based awards (Quality Step Increases and Performance Bonus Awards) require the signature of the Area Director as approving official. Time Off and Spot awards may be approved at the location level. Supervisors may approve Time Off awards up to 10 hours. Awards in excess of 10 hours need approval of the Research Leader, Laboratory Director, or Center Director. All awards must have, as a minimum, the signature of a recommending official and an approving official. The certificates of Merit and Appreciation are to be signed by the Area Director only.
- All employees who receive an Outstanding rating for their performance are to given either a Quality Step Increase (QSI) or performance cash award unless the employee is already at Step 10 of the grade and thus does not qualify for a QSI. A QSI is usually the most beneficial in the long term for the employee: however, a supervisor does not need to give the employee a choice. The rules governing the QSI's and the impact on each employee's pay can be different; therefore, supervisors need to consult with our Personnel Office before awarding a QSI. Only one QSI in a 52-week period may be given.
- A performance award for Superior performance may be initiated at the discretion of the supervisor, but is not mandatory. In giving any performance award, the key is that performance bonuses are intended to recognize good performance throughout the full rating cycle.
- Extra Effort awards are defined in the USDA Guide for Employee Recognition as recognition given for a specific outstanding accomplishment such as a superior contribution on a short term assignment or project, an act of heroism, scientific achievement, major discovery or significant cost savings. Extra Effort awards may be given at any time as long as the contribution fits the criteria above. Dollar amounts are determined by applying the Non-Measurable Benefits Scale on page 12 of the USDA Guide to determine the value of benefits and application. This can also be found at the USDA website at <http://www.afm.ars.usda.gov/hrd/awards/files/DR4040-451-1.pdf>. However, unless there is a

strong justification to substantiate something different, we assume that normally the Value of Benefits for most support personnel (i.e. secretarial/clerical, wage grade technicians, administrative support staffs, support scientists) will be Small/Moderate or Moderate/Substantial and Application will be Limited. For other positions (Category 1 and 4 scientists and Category 6 senior management positions, etc.), the Application will normally be assumed to be Broad. In both cases, an award amount in the Substantial/Extended level must have a strong justification. Also note that any award exceeding \$4000 is above the Area Director's signature authority and requires the Administrator's approval.

- Spot awards are to be used to grant an immediate monetary recognition for one-time contributions (i.e. special project or task force) to the agency's mission or goals. They can range from \$50 to \$750. The award will be deposited to the employee's account within 3 days from receipt of request at headquarters. Employee will receive full amount of award and amount for taxes will be added at NFC for inclusion in annual taxable income.
- Justifications are required for all monetary awards and Time Off awards. Justification for awards must clearly address how the employee's performance or contribution warrants the proposed award. Since an Outstanding rating requires documentation of accomplishments, this can be used as the justification for a cash award. However, if the award for Outstanding is a QSI, a written justification from the supervisor is required. Please follow the Justification Outline in Appendix C of the USDA Guide for Employee Recognition for format.
- Extra Effort awards and Spot Awards are separate from the performance rating of record. Time Off awards may be given for either performance or for a special effort. If time off is given rather than cash, the value will not exceed the value of the comparable cash award. Neither Extra Effort nor Spot Awards are to be tied to the performance rating of record nor are Spot awards to be tied to a long-term project.
- Supervisors are encouraged to use non-monetary recognition where appropriate. Sometimes items such as shirts, jackets, briefcases, etc. can be more appropriate in recognizing an extra effort than cash.
- Monetary awards can be given to Federal employees only. Non-Federal employees are eligible for non-monetary awards only.

3. Point of Contact

For further information, please contact the Area Human Resources Office.

/s/

W.H. BLACKBURN
Area Director
Northern Plains Area

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