

October 6, 2010

SUBJECT: MWA FY11 Award Case Numbers and Award Procedures

TO: MWA Administrative Officers

THROUGH: Diane M. Strub /s/
Deputy Area Director

FROM: Deborah Agee /s/
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The case number format for awards is identical to previous years. The only change will be the Fiscal Year in position 3 of the case numbers. The Personnel Processing System digit field for award case numbers allows for eight digit numbers so we will **use 1 for FY 2011**. The full 8-digit Award Case Number consists of the following:

Positions 1-2, Agency Code = 36 - Midwest Area
Position 3, Fiscal Year Award Effective = 1 (2011)
Position 4, "I" for Individual Award OR "G" for Group Award
Positions 5-8, Sequential Case Number = Number from list below

| <u>LOCATION</u> | <u>SEQUENTIAL CASE NUMBERS</u> |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| W. Lafayette, IN | 0001 through 0115 |
| Columbus/Coshocton/Wooster, OH | 0116 through 0240 |
| Urbana, IL | 0241 through 0355 |
| ADO/AAO | 0356 through 0590 |
| NCAUR | 0591 through 0835 |
| Columbia, MO | 0836 through 0970 |
| Ames, IA | 0971 through 1330 |
| E. Lansing, MI | 1331 through 1444 |
| St. Paul, MN | 1445 through 1558 |
| Morris, MN | 1559 through 1672 |
| Madison, WI | 1673 through 1796 |

In the following MWA FY 2011 Award Procedures, I have made an attempt to clarify and itemize award-related information such as types of awards, amounts given for particular awards, who can approve awards and completion of the Recommendation & Approval of Awards Form AD-287-7. The Department requires justifications for all monetary and time off awards. Anyone can recommend an award but the award must have appropriate approval signatures applied and signed in order of supervisory chain.

Awards including justification sent to HRD by my office will be scanned or copied and returned to the AO for use to make obligation and employee copies for the Location.

The USDA Guide for Employee Recognition, sometimes referred to as the “Blue Book” has more defined award information and was updated September 29, 2006. The direct link to the Guide is www.usda.gov/da/employ/recog.htm. The Guide and “all” award information can be found on the HRD website at www.afm.ars.usda.gov/hrd/awards/index.htm.

1. Who is the Approving Official?

A. In accordance with the USDA Guide for Employee Recognition dated September 29, 2006, all monetary and Time Off awards must have justifications. In accordance with the Midwest Area Award Policy for FY 2008, Extra Effort Awards, Performance Bonus Awards, Quality Step Increases, and Employee Suggestions must have the Area Director’s approval.

B. Effective FY 2008, the Area Director delegated back to the Location the approval of Spot Awards. These must be signed in the order of supervisory chain and must have a justification. The Directors expect the Administrative Officers (AO) to manage the Spot Awards program and ensure the justification is appropriate, the award is timely and in compliance with Department policy (i.e. 6-8 weeks effort and awarded within 30 days of completion), and that no one individual or group of individuals are receiving an inordinate number of Spot Awards. Scanned copies of all Spot Awards and justifications **must** be emailed to my attention for the Area files in a timely manner.

C. Keepsake Awards may be approved by Research Leaders, Center Directors, and Administrative Officers as long as the recommending and approving officials are two different people and signed in order of supervisory chain.

D. Time Off Awards for 1-40 hours may be approved by Research Leaders, Center Directors, and Administrative Officers as long as the recommending and approving officials are two different people signed in order of supervisory chain. Employees can be granted up to 40 hours per award but may not be granted more than 80 hours in a leave year. If a Time Off Award is given to an employee as a performance based award, the value cannot exceed the value of the cash amount listed on the MWA Performance Maximum Amount Award Table and requires the Area Director’s approval signature.

2. Key to Award Amounts.

A. Extra Effort Award

Apply the contribution in the Citation in Block 11 of the form and justification narrative to the Non-Measurable Benefits Scale in the Guide for Employee Recognition and itemize in Block 15. The result is the Award Amount in Block 14. However, if the contribution in Block 11 and justification can be measured in terms of time saved, money saved, or expenditures avoided, use the Measurable Benefits Scale in the Guide to determine the Award Amount in Block 14. The contribution (and justification) must support the applicable Benefits Scale and the Award Amount.

B. Spot Award

Apply the contribution to the Citation in Block 11 of the award form (and justification narrative) to the Non-Measurable Benefits Scale in the Guide for Employee Recognition and itemize in Block 15. The result is the Award Amount in Block 14. The contribution must support the Benefits Scale and Award Amount.

C. Time Off Award

Apply the contribution in Block 11 of the award form and justification narrative to the Time Off Scale of the Guide (and itemized in Block 15), and the result is the Award Amount in Block 14. The contribution and justification must support the Time Off Scale and number of Time Off Hours.

D. Performance Bonus Award

The Award Amount recommended for Block 19 of the award form should be determined using the MWA Performance Award Maximum Amount Table based on the employee's performance rating.

3. When is a Justification Statement required in addition to completing Citation Block 11 of award form?

A. The USDA Guide for Employee Recognition requires a justification statement for all monetary and Time Off awards.

B. For performance based cash awards, the performance appraisal narrative explaining how the employee met or exceeded the elements can also be used as the justification narrative.

C. For performance based Quality Step Increases (QSI) awards, a justification statement in the justification outline is required explaining how the employee exceeded the elements

D. Appendix B of the Guide for Employee Recognition provides a justification outline that may be helpful, if separate justification narrative is done rather than using the performance accomplishment narrative.

4. Award Limitations.

A. Spot Award - Range from \$50 to \$750. Effective 12/17/99, OPM no longer places a limit on the number of Spot Awards an employee can receive in a 12-month period but no individual Spot Award can exceed \$750.

B. Time Off Award - Employees may be granted a maximum of 40 hours of time off for a single contribution and may be granted a total of 80 hours of time off during a leave year. The Time Off Award must be used within one year after the effective date of the award. After the one year period, any unused time off hours are forfeited. If an employee separates from ARS employment, the unused leave is forfeited. The Location will be notified by HRD with an effective date for the Time Off Award. If you have not received notice from

HRD with effect date, contact your Location's assigned HR Processing Assistant. Note: Employees should NOT begin to use the Time Off hours until notification has been received from HRD with effective date of the award.

C. Performance Bonus Award – To be recommended for a performance based cash award, employees must receive a Performance Appraisal Rating of Superior or Outstanding. The MWA Performance Award Maximum Amounts Table is to be used. Employees can only receive one Performance Bonus Award per Performance Appraisal Cycle.

D. Quality Step Increase (QSI) – Employees must receive an Outstanding Performance Appraisal rating. Use of the QSI is not appropriate if an employee was appointed or promoted within the past year. A minimum of 52 weeks must elapse between QSI Awards. Close attention should be given to employee's Within Grade Increase (WGI) effective dates when determining if QSI is appropriate. Generally the QSI has no effect on the WGI, but in some cases, depending on the employee's current step level, the QSI may move the employee into a longer waiting period for the scheduled WGI. If you have questions regarding a QSI and the effect on a scheduled WGI, contact your AO or Deb Agee by email Deb.Agee@ars.usda.gov or phone (309) 681-6633.

E. Keepsake Awards – Non-Monetary Extra Effort Keepsake Awards can be presented as long as the item displays the Department's name and is suitable for display. Examples can include an engraved plaque, framed certificate of appreciation, an item such as a medal, pen and pencil sets, pins, coffee cups, jackets, and hats, to mention a few. Department policy limits the expenditure to no more that \$250 on any one item. Keepsake awards must be approved using Form AD-287-7, in accordance with Agency incentive award policy and for purchasing obligation records.

5. Spot Award Forms are processed as follows.

A. Fax the completed and approved Form AD-287-2, Recommendation and Approval of Awards form and justification statement to *your Location's assigned Processing Assistant* at HRD to Fax (301) 504-1587 with a copy scanned and emailed to my attention -- and or faxed to me for the Area files. Please include your e-mail address on the fax coversheet to HRD - so HRD can notify you when the Spot Award is processed for payment.

B. The Spot award will be processed by HRD for NFC generated direct deposit payment. The AO or Location Support Staff will be notified via email by HRD with a processed date of the Spot award. The award form faxed to HRD serves as Official processing copy. Copies will need to be made for Obligation Record and Employee Copy.

6. Time Off Award Forms (1 – 40 hours) are processed as follows.

A. The Original Award form with justification stapled to the form is sent to your Location's HR Processing Specialist at HRD, WSB in Beltsville.

- B. Scanned copy of award and justification emailed or faxed to me for the Area files.
 - C. Give a copy of award form to the employee's timekeeper **when the effective date is known** to begin documentation/monitoring of the award in webTA.
 - D. Give a copy of the award form to the employee with justification copy attached.
7. The Extra Effort Awards (EEA), Performance Bonus Awards, and Quality Step Increases are processed after Area Director's approval, by my office, as follows:
- A. The Original Award form, justification and/or Performance Appraisal documentation attached are Fed Ex mailed to HRD, WSB.
 - B. Copies of EEA award form and justification will be kept for the Area files. A copy of the EEA and justification will be returned to AO via email with date the award was sent to HRD.
 - C. Due to the volume of performance based awards, copies of performance based award forms, justification and/or performance narrative will be sent to AO. The AO will be notified via email when performance based awards are sent to HRD. A copy will be returned so Obligation and Employee copies can be made at Location.
 - E. As a reminder, Certificates of Merit must be prepared by the Location. If the Area Director's signature is preferred or certificates are for Research Leaders and Center Directors, the Certificate of Merit can be prepared at the Location and sent to my office for the Area Director's signature and will be returned to the AO by Fed Ex to help ensure timely presentation of these certificates.
8. Keepsake Awards (Jackets, hats, cups, etc) are processed as follows:
- A. Keepsake Awards may be approved by Research Leaders, Center Directors, and Administrative Officers as long as the Recommending Individual and Approving Official are different people. The approval signatures must be signed in order of supervisory chain.
 - B. Do not put an Award Case Number on Keepsake Award forms because they are not entered into the Payroll/Personnel System by HRD. Do not mail Keepsake Award forms to HRD. This form is no longer needed by HRD for filing in the employee's Official Personnel Folder.
 - C. Keep the original and copies for your files and as obligation records. Although not required, a copy may be faxed or scanned and sent to my office. As usual, give the employee a copy.
9. Award Files
- AOs are responsible for managing the Location's Award Program and responsible for

ensuring the Spot Awards are managed and implemented appropriately and according to policy. You should be reviewing justifications for these as well as all awards to ensure the award is warranted based on the justification and that the appropriate award tool is utilized. You should also be maintaining copies of all awards in your AO files for CARE and auditing purposes.