

Department of the Interior Departmental Manual

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Series: Personnel Management

Part 370: Departmental Personnel Program

Chapter 451: Awards and Recognition Program

Subchapter 5: Non-Monetary Awards

Originating Office: Office of Human Resources

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5.1 General. Non-monetary recognition awards are granted to employees to recognize their contributions to the Department. Contributions may include:

- A. superior accomplishment of regularly assigned duties;
- B. exceptional achievements of project goals;
- C. noteworthy accomplishments over a sustained period; or
- D. specific contributions to an organization's mission.

5.2 Eligibility for Non-Monetary Awards. Employees of the Department and employees of other Federal agencies may receive non-monetary recognition of nominal value and informal honors.

5.3 Items of Nominal Value. The upper limit for non-monetary recognition of nominal value within the Department of the Interior is \$50 cash value. The Department may increase this amount in succeeding years based on the inflation rate. Nominal value items can be tickets to events, balloons, lapel pins, coffee cups, key chains, pens, paperweights, pen and pencil sets, clocks, plaques, jackets, caps, T-shirts, watches, fruit baskets, gift certificates, and U.S. Savings Bonds or other similar items. Approving officials should exercise care in selecting an appropriate item for non-monetary recognition to avoid potential appearance of misuse of government funds. The approving official should consider whether public disclosure of the item would cause embarrassment to the Department. The item must take an appropriate form to be used in the public sector to be purchased with public funds. Where appropriate, a non-monetary award item should contain the bureau or Departmental name, logo, award title, and/or mission. If there is some level of discomfort or concern, the supervisor should always check with the servicing human resources office for guidance.

A. The recognition method selected should be based on the employee's effort expended, the behavior exemplified or the results achieved. Supervisors can tailor recognition of their

employees based on the personal interests of the individual. Supervisors may ask an employee how he/she would like to be rewarded.

B. Gift certificates cannot exceed nominal value because a gift certificate conveys a clear monetary value, does not have a lasting “trophy” value, nor does it symbolize the employer/employee relationship therefore, it does not meet the criteria for exceeding the nominal value threshold. Because gift certificates can be easily exchanged for cash, gift certificates must be taxed regardless of the amount. Employees may choose whether money is withheld for taxes or claiming the amount of the gift certificate as an increase in income.

5.4 Items that Exceed Nominal Value. Items that can exceed nominal value are those items similar to those listed in paragraph 5.3 of this chapter except that the cost exceeds \$50.00. A non-monetary recognition item may exceed the nominal cash value threshold; however, the cost of any non-monetary item in excess of the nominal value must be included in the employee’s gross wages and would be taxable. The maximum value for a non-monetary award is \$250.00. Items that exceed the nominal 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. 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.

5.5 Informal Honors. Bureaus must establish guidelines and controls for granting informal recognition and awards.

5.6 Time-Off Awards. An excused absence awarded to an employee without charge to leave. Bureaus must establish approval authorities, scheduling guidance, and an appropriate number of hours commensurate with employee contributions, and supervisory responsibilities. The minimum time-off recognition is one hour; the time-off award shall 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. A time-off award must be used while the recipient is employed at the Department; the time-off award cannot be transferred to another agency upon separation of the employee. Further, upon separation from the Department, employees are not entitled to receive payment for any unused time-off award hours. These limits apply to all employees.

5.7 Length of Service Award. Certificates and/or pins awarded at various milestones in an employee’s career. Recognition is usually given in 10-year increments but bureaus may give it in 5-year increments. Bureaus may develop their own Length of Service certificates or order Government-issued certificates through the publication rider process. Pins for 10, 20, 30, 40, and 50 years of Government service are available for procurement through a Departmental contract. Bureaus may use Government-issued Length-of-Service pins if they choose to do so through the GSA procurement process.

5.8 Processing Awards. Any employee aware of an achievement(s) that he/she believes deserves recognition may make an award recommendation to the award recipient's supervisor. The recommendation must be signed by the bureau or office official authorized to approve non-monetary awards.

A. Items of Nominal Value and Informal Honors. Items may be awarded, as appropriate, without completion of form DI-451, Award Certification. There is no limit on how many non-monetary awards an employee can receive in a fiscal year. However, supervisors should avoid granting non-monetary awards and presenting award items several times throughout the fiscal year to avoid any possibility of abuse in granting awards, and to prevent creating tax liabilities for the employee (even if the individual awards are under the nominal value). Tax liability is determined based on the cumulative value of the awards even if each award is under the nominal value. The specific item should be purchased through normal procurement channels. Bureaus and offices should order supplies of specific award items to affect cost savings and provide for immediate recognition of employees.

B. Items that Exceed Nominal Value. A DI-451, Award Certification, is required for items that exceed nominal value. Before finalizing and granting a non-monetary award that exceeds nominal value, the employee should be advised that the award will be taxable to determine if the employee concurs in the granting of the taxable award item.