

Interim Guidance – USGS Monetary (STAR/Group) and Time-Off Awards

Monetary awards provide tangible recognition for hard work and achievement, reinforcing positive behaviors and motivating continued high performance. Monetary awards may accompany annual performance appraisals or be issued throughout the year based on specific special achievements.

Leadership has emphasized the need to take a more proactive approach in reviewing monetary award justifications and award amounts. As a result, beginning August 1, 2025, the Director's Office (DO) chiefs of staff (COS) will convene weekly to evaluate nominations for USGS monetary awards exceeding \$500 and time-off awards exceeding 10 hours. Awards will be reviewed for the clarity and suitability of the justification and will be evaluated for alignment with the current awards table. When additional detail or revision is required, DO COS will reach out to the award author (with a cc to ELT member's COS or identified awards liaison) to facilitate any necessary changes. Once revisions are completed, the revised award may be sent directly to the COS with a cc to the ELT approving member COS or identified awards liaison.

A *Special Thanks for Achieving Results* (STAR) award is used to recognize noteworthy accomplishments that are limited to a one-time occurrence or for exceptional accomplishments. It should not be issued in relation to an employee's annual performance appraisal or the same accomplishment as previously awarded. Accomplishments may be either within or outside the scope of an employee's normal duties. STAR Awards can be used to recognize work contributed by someone from a different office whose actions helped achieve results. Examples of situations for which it would be appropriate to give an employee a STAR award are those in which employees:

- produce exceptionally high-quality work under tight deadlines
- perform added or emergency assignments in addition to their regular duties
- or exercise extraordinary initiative or creativity in addressing a critical need or difficult problem.

To recommend an individual or group STAR Award or time off award, [Form DI-451, "Recommendation and Approval of Awards,"](#) must be completed. Each nomination must include clear and detailed justification demonstrating why the award is warranted. While the nomination form provides space for justification, additional pages may be used as needed to thoroughly describe the employee's contributions. The justification should highlight the employee's achievements, outlining specific accomplishments and their impact or benefits. Award amounts should be appropriate and aligned with the significance of these contributions (see DOI Scale of Awards Based on Intangible Benefits chart).

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SCALE OF AWARDS BASED ON INTANGIBLE BENEFITS

Value of Benefit	EXTENT OF APPLICATION		
	Local	Bureau	Department-wide
	<p>Example Effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one or more field facilities or Central Office organizational elements or staff office, or • a minor change or correction of a DOI form, policy, or procedure, or • optional use of an idea or procedure, or • minor change in the area of technology or automation 	<p>Example Effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an entire network, region, or • all Central Office organizations, or • ideas approved for optional use in the Department or an administration, or • important area of technology or automation 	<p>Example Effects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more than one region, or bureau • has impact DOI wide or beyond.
<p>Moderate. Change or contribution to an operating principle, practice, procedure or program of limited impact or use.</p>	Up to \$500	Up to \$1,500	Up to \$3,000
<p>Substantial. Significant or important change, contribution to, or modification of an operating principle, practice, procedure, program, or service to the public.</p>	Up to \$1,500	Up to \$3,000	Up to \$5,000
<p>Exceptional. Complete revision or initiation of a major policy, practice, or procedure that has significant impact on DOI's mission. Major improvement in the quality of a critical product, activity, program or service to the public.</p>	Up to \$3,000	Up to \$5,000	<p style="text-align: center;">Up to \$10,000</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Awards more than \$10,000 require OPM approval. Awards more than \$25,000 require Presidential approval after OPM review.</p>

Typically, the employee's immediate supervisor initiates the nomination; however, an authorized official outside the employee's supervisory chain may also recommend the award if they are familiar with or have directly benefited from the employee's contributions.

As a reminder, award nominations for other DOI personnel are processed via an intra-agency agreement if someone other than the immediate supervisor initiates the nomination, the Award Certification must be reviewed and approved by the employee's supervisor before the award can be processed. For group awards, the nominating office giving the award must contact and receive supervisory concurrence for each award recipient. No award nomination will be processed without the supervisor's concurrence.

The recommending office is responsible for funding the STAR award.

Employees who have elected deferred resignation are not eligible to receive monetary awards.

Recommendation and Approvals

All of the following approvals are required:

1. Recommending individual
2. Supervisor
3. *Reviewing individual = Center Director or Office Chief
4. *Approving individual = ELT member (may be delegated to deputy).
5. Other bureau required approval = DO COS

*Further delegations will be reevaluated at a later date.

Key items to remember:

- After written concurrence by the supervisor(s), the initiating office creates one (1) DI-451 using the name of one (1) person in that group (usually the lead of the group). Complete boxes 1-3, 5-13, 16, 33 or 39, and 77. Do not enter the social security number in box 4.
- Enter the initiating office's 15-alphanumeric cost account number/WBS in box 16 (example: GX25AA1COMH1400). Time-off awards do not require a cost account number because cash is not involved.
- Route the form for approval as described above (for STAR awards \$500 or more and time off awards that are 10 hours or more).
- After the ELT member, or designee, signs the award, the DI-451 is emailed to dochiefsofstaff@usgs.gov
- Once the "Other Bureau Required" Official signs the DI-451, it is to be emailed to the STAR awards coordinator at "GS-HC Star Awards" With a cc to the recommending individual.
- The STAR awards coordinator will notify the signers of the DI-451 that the award has been processed, the effective date (last Friday of the pay period), and for

- monetary awards, the day the money will appear in the pay checks (the pay day following the effective date).
- The initiating office contacts the supervisor(s) and administrative officer(s) letting them know the award has been processed and the effective date. The initiating office also sends a copy of the complete award to the supervisor(s) and the administrative officer(s). Supervisor(s) should share the award justification and who submitted the award with their award recipient(s). This should be done before the effective date when the SF-50s notification show up in their emails.
 - All STAR Awards must be submitted by 8/29 to process for 9/4 FPPS submittal date and to be paid out in FY25. Anything after 8/29 will be paid out in FY26.

If you have any questions, please contact the STAR awards coordinator at: gs-hc_star_awards@usgs.gov.

**For any STAR or Group awards submitted via webforms during the freeze on processing personnel actions, the originating office must resubmit the awards by emailing the PDF following the new process. HR will not be processing any pending STAR or Group awards in the webforms.