Introduction

Employee award programs recognize and celebrate employee accomplishments. Recognition engages and motivates the workforce and assists in improving overall Agency performance. To promote a culture that recognizes employees in a meaningful way and builds team morale, the Headquarters Awards Program offers a multitude of awards to demonstrate value for employees and for their contributions to NASA’s mission, goals, values, and service to the country.

Program Overview

The desk guide provides a list of employee recognition methods, including descriptions, eligible population, nomination acceptance cycles, and the recognition value, when applicable (i.e., monetary or certificate). The information contained herein is organized by monetary and non-monetary recognition methods.

Note: This desk guide does not reference SES/ST/SL or political appointees.

CS = Civil Servant
C = Contractor
Monetary Award
Recognition Methods

Annual Performance Awards
An Annual Performance Award is a lump-sum payment and/or time-off award based on a rating of record of “fully successful” or higher for an employee in a General Schedule (GS) or equivalent position.

Eligibility: CS

When: Performance-based awards are processed from June to September each year in concert with the NASA Employee Performance Communication System (EPCS) cycle.

Group Awards
A Group Award recognizes achievement made possible by the collective efforts of a group or team comprised of civil service and contractor employees at Headquarters and NASA Centers. Examples of group award achievement may include delivering exceptional customer service, improving NASA cost and time-savings, or generating creative/innovative ideas that support Headquarters initiatives. Contractors receive a certificate in lieu of monetary award.

Eligibility: CS G

When: Group Awards are processed from June to September each year.
On-The-Spot Awards
These awards acknowledge a one-time, short-term effort by employees, particularly an effort related to process improvement that results in service of an exceptionally high quality; and exceeded normal job requirements and contributes. The maximum monetary value of an On-The-Spot Award is $250.

Eligibility: CS

When: On-the-Spot Awards may be granted year-round.

Quality Step Increases (QSI)
A Quality Step Increase is an additional within-grade increase used to recognize and reward GS employees at any grade level who display distinguished performance. A QSI has the effect of moving an employee through the GS pay range faster than by periodic step increases alone.

Eligibility: CS

When: QSI actions are processed from July to August each year.

Special Act or Service Awards
A Special Act or Service Award is a lump-sum cash award to recognize individual employees or a group of employees for a suggestion, invention, or special act or service. These activities exceeded normal job requirements and contribute to the efficiency, economy, or other improvement of Government operations in the public interest. The maximum monetary value of a Special Act or Service Award is $7,500. Contractors receive a certificate in lieu of monetary award.

Eligibility: CS O

When: Nominations are accepted year-round.
A Time-Off Award represents time off from work without loss of pay or charge to leave and is granted to recognize individual employee’s or a group of employee’s for superior accomplishment or other personal effort. A time-off award may be granted along with other forms of awards, as long as the total value of the award given reflects the value of the contribution being recognized. An employee may be awarded a minimum of 8 hours (maximum of 40 hours) for a single time-off award, but may not be awarded more than 80 hours within a leave year.

Eligibility:

When: Time-Off Awards can be granted in conjunction with a performance rating, as well as a singular project or one-time contribution year-round.
Career Service Recognition

Career Service Recognition is granted for Federal career service. Eligibility for career service recognition is based on total years of Federal service, including all honorable military service. Certificates of service and NASA pins are presented for each 5-year interval. Employees with 40 years or more of service are eligible to receive a congratulatory letter from the Administrator. Employees with 50 years or more of service are eligible to receive a congratulatory letter from the U.S. President.

Eligibility: CS

When: Certificates and pins are awarded in accordance with the established intervals.

External Awards Program

The External Awards Program provides an opportunity for NASA to submit nominations for various honorary and monetary awards sponsored and presented by professional societies and similar external organizations, both Government and private sector. Participation in such awards programs allows NASA to provide additional award opportunities to supervisors and nominators to recognize the achievements of both individuals and teams within the NASA family.

When: Varies by award – See NSSC External Award Calendar at: http://aac.nssc.nasa.gov/index.cfm?event=monthView
Letter of Appreciation

A Letter of Appreciation is an expression of gratitude written by a senior leader to an employee or group. This letter serves to recognize a specific effort or sustained exceptional performance.

Eligibility: When: Letters are encouraged year-round.

NASA Agency Honor Awards

The Agency Honor Awards are NASA’s most prestigious recognition presented to selected individuals and groups, both Government and non-Government, who have distinguished themselves by making outstanding contributions to the Agency’s mission. Nominations are reviewed and evaluated by the Headquarters Honor Awards committee, which makes a recommendation to the Incentive Awards Board for a final evaluation and determination. The members of the Headquarters Honor Awards committee are made up of representatives from Mission Directorates and Mission Support Offices.

Eligibility:

- All NASA employees and contractors, Jet Propulsion Laboratory employees, individuals working for NASA under the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA), and employees of other Federal agencies are eligible.
- An individual or group may not receive an Agency Honor Award if they received an Agency Honor Award in the previous award cycle for the same accomplishment.

Detailed descriptions and eligibility requirements for NASA Agency Honor Awards are available at: https://hr.nasa.gov/awards

When: The Agency Honor Award Call for Nominations occurs in October of each year.
NASA Headquarters Honor Awards

The Headquarters Honor Awards program was created to recognize Headquarters civil servants, contractors, and teams who have made exemplary contributions to the Headquarters mission or to the welfare of Headquarters employees. Nominations are reviewed and evaluated by the Headquarters Honor Awards committee made up of representatives from Mission Directorates and Mission Support Offices. The Headquarters Honor Award Ceremony is held in the October timeframe each year.

Eligibility:

- Full-time or part-time civil service employees who have worked for Headquarters for at least 1 year are eligible. Additionally, they must be a Headquarters employee when the nomination closes. All grades are eligible, unless otherwise stated in the award criteria.

- Headquarters contractors who have worked for Headquarters for at least 1 year are eligible. Additionally, they must be Headquarters contractors when the nomination closes.

- Individuals who receive an Agency Group Achievement Award are eligible for Headquarters Honor Awards. However, the nomination must demonstrate contributions to the mission of Headquarters.

Ineligible:

- Detailees from other NASA Centers or from other Federal agencies.

Detailed descriptions and eligibility requirements are available at: https://hr.nasa.gov/awards

When: The Headquarters Honor Award Call for Nominations occurs in July of each year.
Out-of-Cycle Agency Honor Awards

The Out-of-Cycle Agency Honor Award nominations may be submitted for consideration upon completion of a notable project, but beyond the acceptance period of the most recent Agency Honor Award nomination cycle. Requests for NASA Honor Awards outside the annual call for nominations will be rare and based on extraordinary circumstances that warrant an out-of-cycle review. All requests must include a detailed explanation and justification of the reasons the honor award must be presented outside the annual cycle. A situation created by an individual retiring, resigning, or otherwise not being available for the ceremony is not, under most circumstances, adequate justification for an out-of-cycle review. The out-of-cycle nomination should be submitted to the Headquarters Awards Program Manager to be reviewed by the Office of Human Capital Management and the Incentive Awards Board for final determination.

Eligibility: ☒

When: Nominations are accepted outside of established nomination acceptance periods.

Retirement Clock Award

The Retirement Clock Award with engraved plaque is granted to NASA Headquarters retirees. The retiree’s organization requests the clock on behalf of the employee via the NASA Automated Awards System (NAAS).

Eligibility: ☒

When: Presented to the employee at the time of retirement.
For more information, call 202-358-1998 or email award.hq@nasa.gov.