

Peace Corps Incentive Awards Program

HANDBOOK

Attachments

Attachment A: Scale of Awards Based on Tangible Benefits/Scale of Awards Based on Intangible Benefits

Attachment B: Peace Corps Award Nomination Form

Attachment C: Peace Corps Suggestion Form/Peace Corps Suggestion Evaluation Report Form

1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this handbook is to provide procedural guidance on processing all Peace Corps Incentive Awards, both monetary and non-monetary. The policy guidance is found in *Manual Section 662, Peace Corps Incentive Awards Program*.

2.0 Definitions

For purposes of this handbook the following definitions apply:

'*A Delegates*' are those individuals identified as such by MS 114, Section 3.1. For award proposals for members of the Senior Foreign Service and office heads, the Deputy Director or Chief of Staff/Chief of Operations acts as the A Delegate for that proposal.

'*Beneficial Suggestion Award*' means a cash award granted to an employee or group of employees for officially-submitted suggestions which are adopted by management and which directly contribute to the economy, efficiency, or effectiveness of U.S. Government operations.

'*Committee*' means the Incentive Awards Committee established pursuant to MS 662 to oversee the Peace Corps Incentive Awards Program.

'Cash Award' is an award provided as a lump-sum payment in recognition of an achievement.

'Honorary Award' is a symbolic recognition of significant contribution and public recognition.

'Management Officials' are supervisors, office heads, and other Peace Corps employees responsible for overseeing Agency operations.

'Meritorious Step Increase' is an additional within-grade step increase in recognition of high-quality performance above that ordinarily found in the type of position concerned (see also MS 622).

'Non-Peace Corps Awards' are forms of recognition administered by other Federal Agencies, or by private organizations, for which Peace Corps employees are eligible as a result of their official Peace Corps work.

'Special Act or Service Award' is a cash award in recognizing a special act or service or achievement of a non-recurring nature.

'Sustained Superior Performance Award' is a cash award in recognition of sustained excellence.

'Time-Off Award' is an award in recognition of an achievement that grants an employee time off without charge to leave or loss of pay.

3.0 Time-Off Awards

3.1 Criteria

A Time-Off Award may be given in recognition of a significant act or noteworthy contribution to the mission of the Peace Corps.

3.2 Amount

A Delegates may award each employee up to 48 hours Time-off per award nomination or up to 48 hours per fiscal year.

The 48 hours is the maximum number that can be awarded to an individual per fiscal year.

3.3 Procedures

When a supervisor determines that a Time-Off Award is merited, the supervisor shall complete a Peace Corps Award Nomination Form, PC-1577 (Attachment B) and attach an appropriate written justification for the proposed award. The supervisor shall then submit the proposal to the A Delegate for his or her office. If approved by the A Delegate, the proposal shall be transmitted to the Incentive Awards Administrator for review and implementation.

3.4 Use of Time-Off Awards

The following rules apply to the use of a Time-Off Award:

- a. Time-Off Awards may only be used in one-hour increments;
- b. Time-Off Awards may only be used with the permission of the supervisor;
- c. Supervisors may only deny a request to use a Time-Off Award, or cancel a previously granted request, when an exigency of public business requires the employee to be at work during the period proposed for the use of the Time-Off Award;
- d. An employee must use a Time-Off Award within twenty-six (26) pay periods of the pay period in which the Time-Off Award is granted;
- e. Time-Off Awards may not be converted to cash under any circumstances; and
- f. An employee who leaves Peace Corps employment with an unused Time-Off Award forfeits the award.

4.0 Sustained Superior Performance Award

4.1 Criteria

A Sustained Superior Performance Award may be given to an employee whose overall performance was outstanding and whose performance has exceeded expectations over a minimum of six

consecutive months (see Attachment B for documentation requirements).

When superior performance is considered characteristic of an employee's continuing performance, and is therefore expected to continue in the future, a Meritorious Step Increase may be considered as an alternate means for appropriate recognition. (See 7.0 below.)

4.2 Amount

The maximum permissible amount for a Sustained Superior Performance Award shall be ten percent of the employee's base salary. No less than a 52-week period should pass before the employee is eligible for another Sustained Superior Performance Award.

5.0 Special Act or Service Awards

5.1 Criteria

A Special Act or Service Award may be given in recognition of special acts or service contributions of a one-time, nonrecurring nature, connected with or related to official employment, such as performance which has involved overcoming unusual difficulties; creative efforts that make important contributions; performance of assigned duties with special effort or innovation that results in increased productivity, economy, or other highly desirable benefits; or exemplary or courageous handling of an emergency situation related to official employment.

5.2 Amount

The amount of a Special Act or Service Award should be in proportion to the benefits realized by the U.S. Government as a result of the act being recognized. Managers may use the chart at Attachment A to help determine an equitable amount based on the tangible or intangible benefits to Peace Corps. When the award is for a group, all members of the group should share in the recognition. The amount may be shared equally or the total may be divided in proportion to the individual contributions of the employees.

The maximum permissible amount a single employee may receive in the aggregate for one or more Special Act Service Awards in a 52-week period shall be ten percent of the employee's base salary.

6.0 Beneficial Suggestion Award

6.1 Criteria

Beneficial Suggestion Awards may be given in recognition of suggestions that are either outside the employee's assigned responsibilities or within assigned responsibilities but sufficiently significant to warrant special recognition, are adopted by management, and which directly contribute to the economy, efficiency, or effectiveness of U.S. Government operations.

In order to be eligible for an award, a suggestion must be adopted within two years after its receipt by the Agency. The employee making the suggestion may be considered for an award for two years after the suggestion is submitted. An employee making a suggestion is not eligible for an award if the suggestion is put in operation after the two-year eligibility period.

There is no limit to the number of awards an employee may receive for beneficial suggestions adopted.

6.2 Amount

A Beneficial Suggestion Award may range from a minimum of \$100 to a maximum of ten percent of an employee's salary.

The amount of a Beneficial Suggestion Award should be in proportion to the benefits realized by the U.S. Government as a result of the suggestion being recognized, and shall be determined by comparing the contribution of the employee with the tangible/intangible benefits charts included as Attachment A. When the award is for a group, all members of the group should share in the recognition. The amount may be shared equally or the total may be divided in proportion to the individual contributions of the employees.

When an officially-submitted suggestion is adopted but an award is not merited because the suggestion does not meet the award criteria, a letter of appreciation should be sent to the employee who submitted the suggestion. Suggestions of this type include those which are determined to be within the normal duties or responsibilities of the employee or where an appropriate award amount would be less than \$100.

6.3 Documentation of Suggestions

Suggestions shall be in writing and contain the following minimum documentation:

1. A brief description of the current practice or procedure, if any;
2. A description of the suggested change to the existing practice or procedure (if the suggestion is to add a new practice or procedure, a description of what is to be added/implemented);
3. An analysis of the direct, estimated net dollar benefit which would result from adoption of the suggestion over the first 12 month period after its adoption, or a statement of the intangible benefits to the Peace Corps anticipated as a result of its adoption.

6.4 Submission of Suggestions

All suggestions shall be submitted using the Peace Corps Suggestion Box on the front page of the Intranet. The administrators of the suggestion box will forward valid suggestions to the management official with responsibility for the subject matter.

6.5 Evaluation of Suggestions

The responsible management official must provide a prompt and objective evaluation of suggestions submitted to him or her. This responsibility includes securing comments from technical sources on the adoptability of the suggestion and the anticipated benefits, both tangible and intangible. A 'Suggestion Evaluation Report Form,' Form PC-1579, Attachment C, is provided for use in the evaluation of suggestions.

6.6 Award Consideration

If the Peace Corps adopts a suggestion, the management official adopting the suggestion shall recommend a Beneficial Suggestion Award.

An award may be granted for an adopted suggestion even though the original suggestion may have been changed considerably prior to final adoption. The responsibility for evaluating the employee's contribution rests with the adopting official. That official must determine if it was

the employee's original suggestion which motivated management's action in effecting the change.

6.7 Claims against the U.S. Government

The recipient of a Beneficial Suggestion Award will be notified in writing that acceptance of a cash award constitutes an agreement that the use by the U.S. Government of an idea, method, or device for which the award is made does not form the basis of a further claim of any nature against the U.S. Government by the employee, his or her heirs, or assignees.

6.8 Non-Adoption

The decision not to adopt a suggestion may be made only by the management official having the authority to adopt it. The official will notify the employee making the suggestion in writing of the non-adoption decision and the basis for it. A copy of the decision letter, the applicable Suggestion Form and the applicable Suggestion Evaluation Report Form will be forwarded by the management official to the Incentive Awards Administrator for recording purposes.

6.9 Duplicate Suggestions

With duplicate suggestions, the employee making the original suggestion will receive adoption credit and an award, if one is authorized, when the adoption occurs within the two-year award eligibility period. If a duplicate suggestion is instrumental in motivating management to adopt a suggestion which was not previously adopted, the employee making the duplicate suggestion is also eligible for award consideration.

7.0 Procedures for Cash Awards

7.1 Awards up to \$2000

When a supervisor determines that a Sustained Superior Performance or Special Act or Service Award of up to \$2000 is merited or a management official adopting a suggestion determines that a Beneficial Suggestion Award of up to \$2000 is merited, the supervisor or management official, as the case may be, shall complete a Peace Corps Award Nomination Form, PC-1577 (Attachment B) and attach an appropriate written justification for the proposed award (along with, in the case of a Beneficial Suggestion Award, the applicable Suggestion

Form and the applicable Suggestion Evaluation Report Form). The supervisor or management official shall then submit the proposal to the A Delegate for his or her office. If approved by the A Delegate, the proposal shall be submitted to the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) for the appropriate budget official's signature. Following this, the proposal shall be transmitted to the Incentive Awards Administrator for review and implementation.

A Delegates are limited to approving an aggregate of up to \$2000 per employee (this may be one award or several smaller awards) in any given 12 month period. Any further cash awards within this 12 month period must be approved by the Committee.

7.1 Awards of \$2001 to \$5,000

When a supervisor determines that a Sustained Superior Performance or Special Act or Service Award of \$2,001 to \$5,000 is merited or a management official adopting a suggestion determines that a Beneficial Suggestion Award of \$2,001 to \$5,000 is merited, the supervisor or management official, as the case may be, shall complete a Peace Corps Award Nomination Form, PC-1577 (Attachment B) and attach an appropriate written justification for the proposed award (along with, in the case of a Beneficial Suggestion Award, the applicable Suggestion Form and the applicable Suggestion Evaluation Report Form). The supervisor or management official shall then submit the proposal to the A Delegate for his or her office. If approved by the A Delegate, the proposal shall be submitted to the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) for the appropriate budget official's signature. Following this, the proposal shall be transmitted to the Incentive Awards Administrator for presentation to the Awards Committee. If approved by the Awards Committee, the approved suggestion shall be submitted to the Awards Administrator for implementation.

7.2 Awards of \$5,001 to \$10,000

When a supervisor determines that a Sustained Superior Performance or Special Act or Service Award of \$5,001 to \$10,000 is merited or a management official adopting a suggestion determines that a Beneficial Suggestion Award of \$5,001 to \$10,000 is merited, the supervisor or management official, as the case may be, shall complete a Peace Corps Award Nomination Form, PC-1577 (Attachment B) and attach an appropriate written justification for the proposed award (along with, in the case of a Beneficial Suggestion Award, the

applicable Suggestion Form and the applicable Suggestion Evaluation Report Form).

The supervisor or management official shall then submit the proposal to the A Delegate for his or her office. If approved by the A Delegate, the proposal shall be submitted to the OCFO for the appropriate budget official's signature. Following this, the proposal shall be transmitted to the Incentive Awards Administrator for presentation to the Incentive Awards Committee. If approved by the Committee, the proposal shall be transmitted to the Peace Corps Director. If approved by the Director, the award shall be transmitted to the Incentive Awards Administrator for implementation.

7.3 Awards of \$10,001 or more

When a supervisor determines that a Sustained Superior Performance or Special Act or Service Award of \$10,001 or more is merited or a management official adopting a suggestion determines that a Beneficial Suggestion Award of \$10,001 or more is merited, the supervisor or management official, as the case may be, shall complete a Peace Corps Award Nomination Form, PC-1577 (Attachment B) and attach an appropriate written justification for the proposed award (along with, in the case of a Beneficial Suggestion Award, the applicable Suggestion Form and the applicable Suggestion Evaluation Report Form).

The supporting award document shall describe the circumstances of the employee's performance in the function for which he or she is being recommended for such an award. Depending on the circumstances and type of award, the justification should include the following:

1. Explain if the employee performed the function exclusively or as a collateral duty;
2. Cite the legal authority for the Agency's Incentive Awards Program; and explain how the employee's performance aligns with the cited authorities;
3. Provide the scope of the employee's responsibilities;
4. Demonstrate the significant matters and work the employee performed to support the continuity of operations on a high-level basis;
5. Demonstrate how the employee's performance supported the Agency's mission, goals, and values;

6. Demonstrate how the employee's performance saved the Agency money and cite the amount of money saved; and
7. Attach a Peace Corps organizational chart and indicate position of the employee.

The supervisor or management official shall then submit the proposal to the A Delegate for his or her office. If approved by the A Delegate, the proposal shall be submitted to the OCFO for the appropriate budget official's signature. Following this, the proposal shall be transmitted to the Incentive Awards Administrator for presentation to the Incentive Awards Committee. If approved by the Committee, the proposal shall be transmitted to the Peace Corps Director. If approved by the Director, the proposal will then be transmitted to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. If approved by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, the award shall be transmitted to the Incentive Awards Administrator for implementation.

8.0 Meritorious Step Increase

8.1 Criteria (from MS 622 5.3)

To be considered for an MSI, an employee must:

- (a) Perform all or most elements of his or her assigned position at a level that exceeds expectations (see Attachment B for documentation requirements);
- (b) Sustain performance at that level for a period of time sufficient to conclude that such a level is characteristic of his or her performance and is expected to continue in the future (in no case may this period be less than 180 days);
- (c) Be expected to remain for at least 60 days in the same position, or in a similar position at the same grade level;
- (d) Not have received an MSI within the preceding 52 calendar weeks; and,
- (e) Not be at the top step of his or her grade.

8.2 Meritorious Step Increases vs. Incentive Awards

In some instances, the contribution may be of such a nature that a special achievement or an honorary award is more appropriate than an MSI. A cash award and an MSI may not be granted on the basis of the same performance.

8.3 Procedures

When a supervisor determines that a MSI is merited, the supervisor shall complete a Peace Corps Award Nomination Form, PC-1577 (Attachment B) and attach an appropriate written justification for the proposed award, along with the most recent performance appraisal. The supervisor shall then submit the proposal to the A Delegate for his or her office. If approved by the A Delegate, the proposal shall be submitted to the OCFO for the appropriate budget official's signature. Following this, the proposal shall be transmitted to the Incentive Awards Administrator for presentation to the Awards Committee. If approved by the Awards Committee, the proposal shall be submitted to the Awards Administrator for implementation.

9.0 Processing and Funding of Awards

9.1 Processing of Approved Awards

When a cash award is fully and finally approved, the Incentive Awards Administrator or designee shall process the payment and inform the recommending management official.

9.2 Availability of Funds

Cash awards of \$2000 or less and MSIs are charged to the budget of the nominating office. The nominating office is usually the office of the employee receiving the award, except in cases of detail to another office where the nominating office is the office to which the employee has been detailed and except for Beneficial Suggestion Awards where the nominating office is the office that is responsible for adopting the relevant suggestion. No award nomination of any type shall be submitted, nor an award of any type granted, unless funds sufficient to pay for the proposed award are available in the appropriate budget.

9.3 Special Fund

Cash awards over \$2000 will normally be considered for payment from the Special Fund established under MS 662 5.7 unless the office requests that office funds be used. If office funds are used, funds sufficient to pay for the proposed award must be available in the appropriate budget.

If there are more awards proposals submitted than funds available from the Special Fund, the Committee will compare proposals based on the relevant criteria and fund those awards that are ranked the highest or modify award amounts appropriately.

9.4 Award Proposals Modified or Disapproved by the Committee

Per MS 662 5.6, The Committee may modify or disapprove a proposed Incentive Award under its consideration. Possible modifications include a change in the amount or type of the proposed Incentive Award.

If the Committee decides that an Incentive Award proposed by an A Delegate should be modified or disapproved, the Committee will return the proposal with Committee modifications or reasons for disapproval to the A Delegate who proposed it. If the A Delegate accepts the modifications, the modified proposal will be sent to the Incentive Awards Administrator for implementation.

The A Delegate may instead revise the Incentive Award proposal and resubmit it to the Committee for reconsideration. If the Committee accepts the revised proposal, the revised proposal will be sent to the Incentive Awards Administrator for implementation.

If the A Delegate and the Committee cannot agree on a proposed Incentive Award, the A Delegate may ask the Incentive Awards Administrator to initiate an appeal process. The Incentive Awards Administrator will schedule a meeting for the Director, the A Delegate, the Chair and a member of the Committee elected by its members. The appeal meeting should take place as soon as reasonably possible. The Director's decision will be in writing and transmitted to the A Delegate and the Incentive Awards Committee.

9.5 No Self-approval of Awards

This handbook shall not be interpreted to allow any management official to propose, review, approve, or take any other action with respect to an award for such official.

9.6 Peer Nomination of Awards

Employees or groups of employees may nominate their peers (in their own or other offices) for an award by sending an email to HRBenefits@peacecorps.gov or using the HR awards page on the intranet. The nomination will include the peer's name and office and a

justification for the award. The Awards Administrator will send peer nominations first to the supervisor, who has the chance to incorporate the justification into an awards proposal to the Committee or A Delegate (depending on the dollar value the supervisor determines is appropriate). If the supervisor does not act on the peer nomination within 30 days, the Awards Administrator sends the proposal to the Committee for review and possible approval for payment from the Special Fund per 9.3 above. The fact that an approved award was peer-nominated will be communicated to the employee as part of the recognition regardless of the approval level.

10.0 Special Recognition Awards (Cash and Non-Cash Awards)

A Special Recognition Award is awarded in recognition of a significant contribution and includes appropriate public recognition. Special Recognition awards may be used to recognize achievement in a more symbolic fashion. Special Recognition awards may be accompanied by a cash award. Special Recognition awards may be granted for rewarding performance or recognizing achievement that does not merit recognition by other awards.

10.1 Director's Distinguished Service Award

The Director's Distinguished Service Award is for outstanding achievement. The Director's Distinguished Service Award is the Peace Corps's highest form of recognition for distinguished achievement. The Director's Distinguished Service Award can be either a non-cash or cash award not to exceed \$5,000 and a bronze plaque signed by the Peace Corps Director, and briefly states the contribution being recognized. The Director can recognize U.S. Direct Hires, FSNs or PSCs either for individual or group contributions. The award recipients will be recognized during a public awards ceremony. For overseas and locally hired staff, the Director may use other means of media to publicly recognize these individuals. If the award for FSNs or PSCs includes a cash amount, the cash award will be distributed based on appropriate guidance and policy outside of this handbook.

10.1.1 Criteria

The Director's Distinguished Service Award is granted for distinguished service, creative ability, initiative, or courage under especially difficult circumstances, whereby a staff member or group of staff members

have personally made a recognizable, substantial contribution to the Peace Corps and its mission.

10.1.2 Procedures

A Delegates or Country Directors may nominate their staff members for the Director's Distinguished Service Awards. Nominations shall consist of a memorandum describing in detail the nature of the contribution which merits the Director's Distinguished Service Award.

Nominations shall be transmitted to the Incentive Awards Administrator for presentation to the Incentive Awards Committee. If the Incentive Awards Committee approves the recommendation, the proposal shall be submitted to the Peace Corps Director. If the Director approves the award, the proposal will be returned to the Incentive Awards Administrator. The Director has ultimate authority on approving the award amount. The Incentive Awards Administrator will prepare the plaque, which shall be presented by the Peace Corps Director during a publicly held awards ceremony.

10.2 A Delegates Outstanding Service Award

The Outstanding Service Award is for outstanding achievement. It is approved by any of the A Delegates (e.g CIO Outstanding Service Award or VRS Outstanding Service Award). The Outstanding Service Award consists of a certificate signed by the appropriate A Delegate and briefly states the contribution being recognized. Each A Delegate will grant recognition to employees as he/she deems appropriate. The award may, or may not, include the addition of money to accompany the award. The award recipients will be recognized during a public awards ceremony.

10.2.1 Criteria

The Outstanding Service Award is granted for distinguished service, creative ability, initiative, or courage under especially difficult circumstances, whereby a staff member or group of staff members have personally made a recognizable, and important contribution to the Peace Corps and its mission or to the operations of the awarding office.

10.2.2 Procedures

Subordinate supervisors may nominate their staff for the Outstanding Service Awards. Nominations shall consist of a memorandum to the relevant A Delegate describing in detail the nature of the contribution which merits the Outstanding Service Award.

Nominations that include cash awards must follow the appropriate procedures in 7.0 above for approval.

10.3 Appreciation Award

Appreciation awards are intended to recognize contributions of lesser scope that might otherwise go unrecognized. Informal recognition awards take the form of non-monetary items such as a certificate of recognition signed by the Peace Corps Director or lesser official. Appreciation awards may be approved by any manager or supervisor.

10.3.1. Criteria

Given the informality of such awards and the non-monetary items presented, informal awards must meet the following criteria:

- The item must be of nominal value.
- The item must take an appropriate form such as a Peace Corps certificate and may be purchased with public funds

Certificates are normally presented by an appropriate management official in a public ceremony or staff meeting.

11.0 Career Service Recognition

Although Career Service Certificates and Retirement Certificates are not Incentive Awards, they are issued to employees to recognize significant milestones in the employee's Federal Service career.

11.1 Career Service Certificates

11.1.1 Recognition

Career Service Certificates, signed by the Peace Corps Director, are to be given to employees completing 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, and 40 years of creditable Federal Service.

11.1.2 Foreign Service National Employees

FSN employees will receive Peace Corps Career Service Certificates signed by the Peace Corps Director and presented by the Country Director.

11.1.3 Procedures

The Incentive Awards Administrator shall prepare the certificates for U.S. direct-hire employees based on monthly personnel operations reports.

Country Directors shall inform the Incentive Awards Administrator of an FSN's completion of 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, and 40 years of creditable Federal Service at least 60 days prior to the date the FSN does so. The Incentive Awards Administrator shall then prepare the appropriate certificate.

The Incentive Awards Administrator will forward the certificates to the appropriate A Delegates or Country Director, who will arrange for their presentation, normally in a public forum.

11.2 Retirement Certificates

11.2.1 Recognition

Employees retiring under provisions of the Civil Service Retirement System, Federal Employee Retirement System, or Foreign Service Retirement Systems will receive a framed Retirement Certificate signed by the Peace Corps Director along with a retirement lapel pin.

11.2.2 Certificate Preparation and Presentations

The Incentive Awards Administrator will prepare the certificate. The appropriate A Delegate will arrange for a presentation of the certificate in a public forum, unless the employee prefers not to receive the public recognition. Efforts should be made to make the presentation with participation of the highest level appropriate Agency officials.

12.0 Non-Peace Corps Awards

'Non-Peace Corps Awards' are forms of recognition administered by other federal agencies, or by private organizations, for which Peace Corps employees are eligible as a result of their official Peace Corps work. They do not include awards or titles conferred by foreign

governments (for rules on the acceptance of awards granted by foreign government, see 5 U.S.C. 7342, et seq.).

Eligibility criteria and instructions with respect to procedures governing Non-Peace Corps Awards are issued by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management and/or the private organization sponsoring the particular award.

The Peace Corps or an individual management official may make nominations for a Non-Peace Corps Award, as appropriate. Nominations shall be transmitted to the Incentive Awards Administrator. The Incentive Awards Administrator shall review the nomination and work with the appropriate management official, as necessary, to achieve conformance with applicable rules. The Incentive Awards Administrator, with consultation from the Incentive Awards Committee, as appropriate, shall then submit the nomination to the appropriate non-Peace Corps entity, and shall arrange to have the nomination properly recorded in the Official Personnel Folder of the appropriate employee.

Supervisors, office heads, and other management officials are encouraged to take an active interest in the submission of nominations for Non-Agency Awards.

At any time a non-Peace Corps award is granted to a Peace Corps staff member, such an honor shall be recognized in a public awards ceremony.