

**FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
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4.1 What is the purpose of this chapter? This chapter describes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) monetary awards program.

4.2 What is the scope of this chapter?

A. This chapter applies to Service employees and teams of employees.

(1) Political appointees (Schedule C) are not eligible to receive monetary awards between June 1st of any year in which there is a Presidential election and January 20th of the following year.

(2) Political appointees (Schedule C) above the GS-12 level and non-career Senior Executive Service (SES) employees are not eligible for monetary awards.

(3) Career SES employees may receive monetary awards under this program, but only with the Executive Resources Board's approval.

B. Consultants, volunteers, partners, and contractors are not eligible for monetary awards (see 150 FW 3 for volunteer award information).

4.3 What are the authorities and responsibilities for the chapter? See 224 FW 3 for a list of the authorities and responsibilities for all the chapters related to the awards and recognition program (224 FW 3 – 6).

4.4 What is a monetary award? A monetary award is a cash award. They include STAR awards, ratings-based performance awards, and Quality Step Increases (QSI). An employee may be recognized for the same accomplishment using more than one type of award as long as the combined value of the awards is commensurate with the accomplishment.

4.5 What are the general considerations for giving monetary awards?

A. We use monetary awards to increase productivity by financially rewarding those whose performance is

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substantially above normal job requirements and standards.

B. Managers have a major responsibility for ensuring the effective use of awards. They must determine the type of recognition that most appropriately recognizes the contribution, is most motivating to the employee(s), and is most cost-effective in terms of return on investment by:

- (1) Granting recognition based solely on merit,
- (2) Selecting the most appropriate form of recognition,
- (3) Awarding contributions in a timely manner, and
- (4) Assuring equity of consideration for awards within respective organizations.

4.6 When is giving a monetary award not appropriate?

A. Some circumstances that make a monetary award inappropriate are:

- (1) Pending or recent grade promotions that recognize the same performance so they have provided adequate recognition of the employee's high level of performance,
- (2) An employee has already been recognized with a monetary award for the same accomplishment,
- (3) An employee recently received a QSI that is still adequate recognition of the employee's high level of performance, and
- (4) An employee is under consideration for disciplinary action based on conduct or performance issues.

B. In addition to the reasons above, a QSI may not be appropriate in the following circumstances:

- (1) An employee is nearing retirement and would benefit only for a limited period.
- (2) An employee is about to receive or has just received a promotion, selection for which included consideration of the high level of performance the QSI would recognize.
- (3) An employee's contribution is so significant that a large lump-sum payment would be more fitting recognition than a smaller continuing benefit.
- (4) An employee is moving to a position not in his/her established career development progression either within or outside of the Service.
- (5) An employee has been detailed to another position.
- (6) An employee's job is changing to a degree where new performance requirements have an impact on the position.

C. Federal Wage System employees and SES employees are not eligible for QSIs.

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STAR AWARDS

4.7 What are STAR awards, and what are the requirements for granting them?

A. STAR award defined: A Special Thanks for Achieving Results (STAR) award is a cash award of \$50 or more. The amount of the award should be commensurate with the value of the individual or team accomplishment, considering the overall benefit to the Government. Managers may grant this award:

- (1) For achievement on an individual project or for overall performance,
- (2) Only once for a specific accomplishment, and
- (3) For accomplishments achieved once or over a long or short time period.

B. Nomination process:

(1) An employee's immediate supervisor normally nominates an employee using Form DI-451 (Recommendation and Approval of Awards), but any other supervisory or other official knowledgeable of an employee's contributions may nominate him/her. If someone other than the employee's immediate supervisor nominates the employee, the supervisor must sign Form DI-451 before we can process the award for payment. The supervisor should send the nomination through the chain of command to the servicing Human Resources office (HRO). The HRO cannot process STAR award nominations without the concurrence of the individual's immediate or second-level supervisor.

(2) The Recommending Official must ensure that the proper 15-digit cost account number is entered on the DI-451. Enter the account numbers as follows:

4-digit subactivity code XXXX	4-digit project code XXXX	5-digit org code XXXXX	2-digit ABC code XX
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C. Justifications: There is a section of Form DI-451 for the Recommending Official to provide a justification for the award. The justification:

- (1) Must reflect the employee's accomplishments,
- (2) Must be specific to the employee and his or her activities and include details and outcomes of the employee's actions, and
- (3) Should contain a statement about how the actions helped achieve tangible or intangible benefits to the Government. This statement helps justify the amount of the award granted.

D. Amounts and Payment:

- (1) A single STAR award may be \$50 or more, gross.
- (2) There is no monetary cap for receiving STAR awards during a performance year. Managers should be prudent about making awards to keep them cost-efficient and to ensure they are not over-used and remain meaningful.
- (3) STAR awards are paid through the Federal Personnel and Payroll System.

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E. STAR awards for teams and groups: It is appropriate to recommend STAR awards to teams or groups when you can show that the total achievement of a project, assignment, or team effort was dependent on the performance of each member involved.

(1) You must submit a separate Form DI-451 to your servicing HRO for each member of the team or group.

(2) In most cases, the total amount of a cash award to a group should not exceed the amount that you would give to an individual for the accomplishment. When considering an award for a group of more than 8 or 10 employees, keep in mind that when each employee receives a portion of the overall amount, a member's share may diminish as the number of employees in the group increases. You may consider a Unit Award for Excellence of Service a more appropriate recognition for the accomplishments (see 224 FW 6 for more information on Honor Awards).

(3) The written justification for a group award must include the specific contribution of each member of the group to the overall accomplishment. Each member of the group, including supervisors, may share equally in the award or in proportion to the individual contribution.

4.8 Who must approve STAR awards? Table 4-1 shows the approval authorities for STAR awards. Be sure to submit awards through regular supervisory channels before sending them on to your Directorate member or the Director.

Table 4-1 Approval Authorities for STAR Awards			
STAR Award	Recommending Official	Reviewing Official	Approving Authority
> \$10,000	Director	Assistant Secretary – Fish and Wildlife and Parks (FWP)	Secretary and Office of Personnel Management
\$5,001 - \$10,000	Directorate Member	Director	Assistant Secretary - FWP
\$2,501 - \$5,000*	Manager or Supervisor	N/A	Directorate Member*
≤\$2,500	Manager or Supervisor	N/A	2 nd Level Manager or Supervisor

*Regional Directors may delegate to Assistant Regional Directors the authority to approve up to \$4,000.

MONETARY PERFORMANCE AWARDS

4.9 What are monetary performance awards, and what are the requirements for granting them?

A. Monetary performance award defined: These are cash awards that managers base on an employee's official rating of record (performance rating). Managers should grant them in a way that differentiates between levels of performance. Higher performers in an organizational unit should receive higher monetary awards (in terms of percentage of pay) than their peers who receive lower ratings.

B. Nomination process:

(1) Managers nominate employees for these awards using Form DI-451. They must attach the performance appraisal to the form (see section 4.9C) and send it to their servicing HRO.

(2) They give these awards once a year at the end of the performance year (October 1 - September 30). They are based on an employee's performance review rating (see 224 FW 1 on the Service's Performance Management System). Award nominations are due no later than November 30.

C. Justifications: Managers must attach a copy of the performance appraisal, which serves as justification for the performance award, to the Form DI-451. They must also include a narrative describing the employee's

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performance for each critical element rated as *Exceptional (Level 5)* or *Superior (Level 4)*.

(1) Employees who achieve an *Exceptional (Level 5)* rating must be CONSIDERED for an award and are eligible for a cash award ranging from 3 to 5 percent of base pay (including locality pay and special rate supplements).

(2) Employees who achieve a *Superior (Level 4)* rating must be CONSIDERED for a cash award ranging from 1 to 3 percent of base pay (including locality pay and special rate supplements), a Time-Off Award, a nonmonetary award, or some other appropriate recognition.

(3) Employees who receive a *Fully Successful (Level 3)* rating are not eligible for performance-based awards. A manager may give them STAR awards based on their accomplishments throughout the year.

4.10 Who must approve performance awards? Table 4-2 shows the approval authorities for monetary performance awards.

Table 4-2 Approval Authorities for Monetary Performance Awards			
Award Amounts	Recommending Official	Reviewing Official	Approving Authority
> \$2,500*	Manager or Supervisor	2 nd Level Manager or Supervisor**	Directorate Member*
\$50 - \$2,500	Manager or Supervisor	N/A	2 nd Level Manager or Supervisor

*Regional Directors may delegate this authority to Assistant Regional Directors.

**If the 2nd Level Manager or Supervisor is a Directorate Member, then there is no need for a Reviewing Official.

QSIs

4.11 What are QSIs, and what are the requirements for granting them?

A. QSIs defined: A QSI raises an employee's basic rate of pay and has continuing benefits, such as increasing the recipient's life insurance coverage. QSIs will often favorably affect subsequent promotions and retirement computations. Because a QSI is a continuing benefit, managers should carefully consider the continuing costs to the Government versus the motivational value to the employee.

(1) A recommendation for a QSI is appropriate only when all of the following conditions exist:

(a) The employee has received a summary performance rating level of *Exceptional (Level 5)*,

(b) The high level of performance has been sustained for at least 6 months,

(c) The employee's recent performance appraisal supports the conclusion that the overall performance of his/her assigned duties and responsibilities substantially exceeds an acceptable level of competence so that, when viewed as a whole, the employee's performance is at a high level of quality,

(d) The performance exceeds normal or typical performance to such an extent that faster than usual pay advancement is warranted,

(e) The performance must give promise of continuing at the same high level in the future, and

(f) The employee is expected to remain in the same or similar position at the same grade level for at least 60 days after the effective date of the QSI.

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(2) You cannot grant a QSI for:

(a) An employee who is moving to a position outside of the Service, or

(b) An employee who receives a summary performance rating that is less than *Exceptional (Level 5)*.

(3) You must not grant more than one QSI within any period of 52 weeks.

(4) We will not deliberately delay processing of a QSI to wait for an employee's regular within-grade increase to be processed.

B. Other issues for managers to consider before granting QSIs:

(1) Before granting a second QSI to an employee still in the same job or to an employee whose position has been downgraded and he/she is receiving retained pay, managers should consider whether the relationship between pay and performance justifies the increase.

(2) A QSI is an additional within-grade salary increase, so an employee who receives a QSI does not have to begin a new waiting period to meet the requirements for a regular within-grade increase. Sometimes a QSI will extend the waiting period for the regular within-grade increase. This happens when the QSI places the employee in the fourth or seventh step of the pay range where the waiting period between steps is longer. When a within-grade increase is due at the time a QSI is being processed, we process the QSI to the advantage of the employee so that the employee can receive both deserved forms of recognition—the within-grade increase for acceptable competence and the QSI for superior performance that we expect will continue at the same high level in the future.

(3) When managers consider recommending a QSI for an employee who received a QSI the previous year, they must consider the continuing benefits of the previous award and ensure that the employee's performance for the proposed award exceeds that determined the previous year.

(a) If an employee performs to the extent his/her overall performance warrants annual monetary recognition, the manager should consider the possibility of job reassignment or promotion to better use the capabilities of the employee and to enhance his/her effectiveness and contributions to the organization.

(b) Repeated QSI awards to an individual may also indicate that performance standards are too low or the position needs reclassification.

C. Nomination process for QSIs:

(1) The immediate supervisor typically recommends employees for QSIs, but an official or supervisor higher in the line authority who can document and substantiate the justification for the proposed award may also recommend a QSI.

(2) Managers use Form DI-451 to nominate employees for QSIs. They should send the Form DI-451 and a copy of the performance appraisal through normal supervisory channels, to their Directorate member, and then to the servicing HRO for processing.

(3) QSI recommendations are due within 90 days of the end of the performance year. If processing a QSI is delayed beyond 90 days, a request for an exception to the deadline must be sent to the Department's Office of Human Resources for approval.

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(a) The waiver request must be a memorandum that includes the signatures of the rater and reviewer. It should explain why it was not possible to process the rating and the QSI within 90 days from the end of the performance year.

(b) Route the waiver request through appropriate supervisory channels and the servicing HRO. The HRO will send it to the appropriate Directorate member and the Director for signature.

D. Justifications: Justifications for QSIs must clearly indicate that the performance exceeds normal requirements to a degree that justifies award recognition.

4.12 Who must approve QSIs? Table 4-3 shows the approval authorities for QSIs.

Table 4-3 Approval Authorities for QSIs			
Award Type	Recommending Official	Reviewing Official	Approving Authority
QSIs	Manager or Supervisor	2 nd Level Manager or Supervisor*	Directorate Member**

*If the 2nd Level Manager or Supervisor is a Directorate Member, then there is no need for a Reviewing Official.

**Regional Directors may delegate this authority to Assistant Regional Directors.

4.13 How do HROs process monetary awards after they're approved? After receiving appropriate approvals, the Recommending Official should send the nomination to the servicing HRO for processing. If an employee is under the supervision of one Region but is serviced by another Regional HRO, only the servicing office will process the award nomination for payment. This prevents an employee from receiving duplicate compensation for the same contribution.

4.14 How should managers present monetary awards? Recommending Officials should determine the most appropriate way to present monetary awards. They should also ensure that the employee receives a copy of the Form DI-451 for his/her records.

4.15 What are the auditing and review procedures for monetary awards? Each fiscal year, servicing HROs must review all monetary awards processed in the Region. The review should include analysis of award patterns, program equality, and compliance with Service policy.

/sgd/ Rowan W. Gould
ACTING DIRECTOR

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