PHS
COMMISSIONED CORPS
AWARDS

A Reference Guide

For information or questions, please contact:

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Nomination Process for Honor Awards for Commissioned Corps Officers

Step 1. Gather Information

To begin the nomination process, supervisors may wish to review accomplishments listed in the officer's most recent Commissioned Officers' Effectiveness Report. Talk to others who have worked with the officer. The Awards Coordinator can provide you with a copy of the officer's awards history so you can see what awards the officer has already received.

Step 2. Select the Appropriate Award

There are six individual honor awards for which PHS commissioned officers may be nominated: the DSM, MSM, OSM, CM, AM, and CIT. There is no progression or order in which an officer must receive these awards. Rather, the individual award criterion determines the appropriate level of an award. Attachment 1 lists each award, with criteria for each and the individual authorized to approve the award.

To select the appropriate **individual** award, consider the following:

- Scope of impact of the accomplishment: international, national, regional, office level

- Magnitude of achievement: Assess the extent that the accomplishment is above and beyond what would be expected of an employee at that grade in that position, the complexity of the achievement, or the specialized or unique skills that were required to accomplish the achievement being recognized.

- Leadership: degree of demonstrated initiative, and the level of program managed or directed.

- Length of time: the time period covered by the award nomination (long-, mid- or short-term).

- Valor: degree of risk to personal safety, level of heroism, demonstration of courage, magnitude of savings to life, health or property

To select the appropriate **unit** award, consider the following:

- Importance and significance of the actions in furthering the mission of the agency.

- Extent to which the achievement exceeds that which is normally expected of such officers.

- Officers receive a unit award because of their collective contributions to the cited action(s) of the unit. The appropriateness of inclusion of each officer should be considered individually by the nominator.

- The specific role of each officer need not be cited in a nomination unless it is a useful clarification that strengthens the total nomination package.

- An officer who has demonstrated a level of accomplishment that significantly exceeds the efforts of other members of the unit, may be nominated for an Individual Honor Award (the individual honor award nomination must specify and clarify the unique achievements). For a specific activity, an officer may normally receive either an individual honor award or the Unit Honor Award, but not both.

- An officer who is a member of a unit that also includes civilians, may be recognized with either the OUC or UC, as appropriate. While civilian members of the unit will be recognized through the civilian awards system, the civilian members will be listed on the award nomination.

STEP 3. Complete the Nomination Form

Complete form PHS 6342-1 for a Unit Award or form PHS 6342-2 for an individual award. These forms are available at: http://dcp.psc.gov/PDF_docs/PHS-6342-1.PDF and http://dcp.psc.gov/PDF_docs/PHS-6342-2.pdf Copies are attached at the end of this handout.

Nominations must be formally initiated within 13 months after the specific period of service that is being recognized.

Nominations may be initiated by a fellow officer, co-worker, supervisor, or others.

Only one individual honor award may be approved for an officer per annual awards cycle (July 1 to June 30 of the next year), except in very unusual circumstances. This does not apply to unit awards, service awards, awards given by the Surgeon General, or awards for valor.

Step 4. Write the Narrative

Include an introductory paragraph that describes the general criteria for the award being considered (e.g. continuous leadership, major public health impact, etc.) and the time period covered by the nomination.

The narrative should clearly state how the officer has met the award criteria, and the extent that the achievement is above and beyond the expectations for the officer.

State the background, to provide perspective on the problem, and how the officer addressed the issue.

State the public health impact/significance of each accomplishment in non-technical language.

Facts, figures, data and dates assist in demonstrating the impact of a nomination.

Avoid using extraneous information that may detract from the nomination. Assure that the narrative reflects activities from only the time period stated.

If a nomination includes the work of others, a nomination for an individual award must clarify how the nominated individual's achievement is over/above that of others. If writing a unit award, focus on the unit's accomplishments.

The award must be based on achievements that have not been the basis of a prior PHS Commissioned Corps award, unless the previous award is a portion of a more senior award over a longer period. The nomination must clarify the basis of the prior award and relevance to the present nomination.

Attachment 2 provides specifics on the recommended format for the award nomination.

Step 5. Obtain Appropriate Signatures

Each award nomination must be signed by the nominator. In addition, if the award nomination originates from <u>within</u> FSIS, it should be co-signed by the Assistant Administrator of the Office to which the officer is assigned (or his/her designee).

Attachment 3 provides a checklist to use before submitting the nomination; Attachment 4 lists the most common trouble spots encountered when writing nominations.

Step 6. Submit the Package

The completed award nomination package should be sent to:

CAPT Cindy Pond
FSIS PHS Awards Coordinator
USDA/FSIS

1400 Independence Avenue SW
Room 3150 South Building
Mail Stop 3730
Washington, DC 20250-3730

ATTACHMENT 1

Levels, Criteria and Approving Authority for Commissioned Corps Awards

Award	Criteria/Specifics	Approving Authority
Individual Awards		
Distinguished Service Medal (DSM)	▪ Highest award given to a PHS commissioned officer. ▪ For exceedingly high level of achievement ▪ For exceptional contributions to the mission of the PHS through management of a major health program or an initiative resulting in a major impact on the health of the Nation. ▪ The award can also be conferred for a one-time heroic act resulting in great saving of life, health, or property.	Review by FSIS Awards Board Endorsement by FSIS Administrator Review by the PHS Awards Board Approval by the Surgeon General
Meritorious Service Medal (MSM)	▪ Second highest recognition granted to PHS commissioned officers ▪ For meritorious service of a single, particularly important achievement; a career notable for significant accomplishments in technical or professional fields; or unusually high quality and initiative in leadership. ▪ Accomplishments meriting this award may include a highly significant achievement in research, program direction, or program administration; a series of significant contributions; a continuing	Review by FSIS Awards Board Endorsement by FSIS Administrator Review by the PHS Awards Board Approval by the Surgeon General

Award	Criteria/Specifics	Approving Authority
	period of meritorious service; or an exhibition of great courage in hazardous work or in an emergency.	
Outstanding Service Medal (OSM)	▪ For continuous outstanding leadership in carrying out the mission of the PHS; for a single accomplishment that has had a major effect on the health of the Nation; or a heroic act resulting in the preservation of health or property.	Review by FSIS Awards Board Endorsement by FSIS Administrator Review by the PHS Awards Board Approval by the Surgeon General
Commendation Medal (CM)	▪ For proficiency and dedication distinctly greater than that expected of the average commissioned officer. ▪ Examples include sustained high quality achievements in scientific, administrative, or other professional fields; application of unique skill or creative imagination to the approach or solution of problems; or noteworthy technical and professional contributions that are significant to a limited area.	Review by FSIS Awards Board Approval by the FSIS Administrator
Achievement Medal (AM)	▪ For superior efforts or outcomes in accomplishing a program's mission. ▪ Examples include recognition of the advancement of program objectives; sustained above-average accomplishment; or superior dedication to duty over a relatively short period of time.	Review by FSIS Awards Board Approval by the FSIS Administrator
PHS Citation (CIT)	▪ For a specific and noteworthy achievement, generally for a short period of time. ▪ Examples include	Review by FSIS Awards Board Approval by the FSIS Administrator

Award	Criteria/Specifics	Approving Authority
	contributions toward accomplishing a program objective or high quality achievement, but at a lesser level than is required for the AM.	
Unit Awards		
Outstanding Unit Citation (OUC)	▪ For a group of officers who exhibit outstanding contributions toward achieving the goals and objectives of the PHS. The unit must have provided outstanding service, often of national or international significance.	Review by FSIS Awards Board Endorsement by FSIS Administrator Review by the PHS Awards Board Approval by the Surgeon General
Unit Commendation (UC)	▪ For superior accomplishment by a defined group of commissioned officers, who have demonstrated a significant level of achievement well above that normally expected, but at a lesser level than required for the OUC.	Review by FSIS Awards Board Approval by the FSIS Administrator

Note: The examples given in the criteria are illustrative and are to be construed broadly.

ATTACHMENT 2

Recommended Format for CC Awards
(Narrative must not exceed two pages)

Nomination for (Name of officer) for the (Name of PHS Award)

Accomplishment
The accomplishment paragraph should begin with the "citation" that will be used on the award certificate. The time period covered by the nomination should also be stated in this paragraph. This paragraph should briefly state the impact of the accomplishment (such as major health impact or national impact on the health of the American people, etc.).

Background
This paragraph is designed to give background information to the reviewers of the nomination about the nominee and the background and circumstances prior to the accomplishment. This paragraph may also identify the nominee's regular duties and how they differ from the accomplishment.

Intervention
Describe what the nominee accomplished that resulted in the individual meriting the award. Specific action accomplishments may be listed in "bullet" format for clarity. The narrative should identify exactly how the officer meets the award criteria and the extent that the achievement is above and beyond the officer's expected performance of duty.

Bullets should be clear and concise. The bullets are actually a list of accomplishments. Bullets serve to group all similar accomplishments together.

Outcome
This is the summary of the accomplishments and the impact they have had (on FSIS, public health practices, etc.) This section should be strong, clear, and definite. Don't list unfinished tasks here, such as "the work was so outstanding that it will be published in …". This type of statement will result in the award being returned since the accomplishment has not been met (publishing the work). By adding extraneous information, attention may be diverted from the actual accomplishment.

ATTACHMENT 3

Checklist for CC Awards

1. Are all signatures present and original, and did each endorser indicate the award they endorsed?
2. Does the award nomination meet the criteria established for that award?
3. Is the work described in the narrative over and above the officer's assigned duties?
4. Was this work part of a group effort? If so, the nomination must be for a group award, not an individual award.
5. If this is an individual honor award nomination, has the officer already received an individual honor award for this award cycle (July 1 through June 30)?
6. Is the period of time covered by the nomination appropriate for the award?
7. Are accomplishments cited in the narrative limited to those within the period covered by the nomination?
8. Does the narrative match the citation on the nomination form?
9. Are specific accomplishments or impact or outcome clearly stated?
10. Has the officer already been recognized with a CC honor award for this work? This applies whether the award in an individual award or a group award.
11. Is the narrative too technical? Will non-FSIS people understand the level of effort and the impact?
12. If the nomination is for a period of time which includes lower level awards, is there an explanation as to how the accomplishments for the lower awards has been exceeded and how those accomplishments contributed to the current outcome?
13. Does the narrative exceed two pages? Is the font a standard font?
14. Does the narrative speak for itself? Is additional information needed to understand the whole story?
15. Does the narrative leave any issue open that might lead the approving official or awards board to believe the accomplishments might be unfinished?
16. Does the narrative contain "glowing" adjectives that don't mean anything?

ATTACHMENT 4

The Eight Most Common Reasons Award Nominations Are Disapproved

1. The nomination fails to meet the criteria for the award selected.

2. The narrative is very general, with few specific accomplishments and poorly stated impact.

3. The narrative is grammatically incorrect. Mistakes in punctuation, spelling, run-on or fragmented sentences are seldom accepted by approving officials.

4. The narrative describes activities that seem to be a routine part of the officer's job; the narrative does not clearly show what has been done that is above and beyond the regular duty.

5. The board has difficulty determining if a nomination should be part of a unit award rather than an individual award.

6. Tasks that are critical to the award nomination have not been completed.

7. The board has difficulty determining the impact of the officer's accomplishment. For example, how did this specifically impact the operation of the Office; what was the level of negotiation or coordination; how did this relate to savings in time or improvement in operations or public health/public safety?

8. The narrative describes work that has already been recognized.

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