



United States Public Health Service Honor Awards: The Basics of Award Write-ups

Objectives



This presentation provides officers the tools to:

1. Understand the importance of United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps Honor Awards
2. Write awards

Overview of Presentation



- Importance of Awards
- Types of Honor Awards – Individual and Unit
- Writing Awards
- Awards and Career Planning
- Summary
- Resources

Importance



Awards are important for many reasons:

- Recognition by the United States Public Health Service for your hard work
- Demonstrate your leadership capabilities, as well as highlight other important essential abilities
- Career progression - awards are tied directly to the promotion process ([Promotion Benchmarks](#))

Awards are worth the time and effort!



Types of Awards

- Honor Awards
 - Individual and Unit Honor Awards
 - General criteria: achievement- and performance-based
- Service Awards
 - Set criteria: granted in recognition of a specific type of service or activity, or for service during a specific period
- Campaign Medals
- Training Awards
- Regular Corps Ribbon
- Badges and Insignia

Individual Honor Awards



- Six awards for which officers may be nominated
 - PHS Citation (CIT)
 - Achievement Medal (AM)
 - Commendation Medal (CM)
 - Outstanding Service Medal (OSM)*
 - Meritorious Service Medal (MSM)*
 - Distinguished Service Medal (DSM)*
- Four additional awards for which there is no nomination process (conferred at Surgeon General’s discretion):
 - Assistant Secretary for Health’s Exceptional Service Medallion (ASHM)
 - Assistant Secretary for Health’s Exceptional Service Medal (ASHESM)
 - Surgeon General’s Medallion (SGM)
 - Surgeon General’s Exemplary Service Medal (SGESM)
- Although there is **no order** in which an officer must receive these awards, certain awards are benchmarks for promotion to particular ranks

*DSM, MSM, and OSM may be also awarded “with valor” for recognizing acts of courage and bravery.

Criteria for Individual Honor Awards



PHS Citation (CIT)

- Recognizes a single, noteworthy achievement
- Achievement typically conducted over a short period of time

Achievement Medal (AM)

- Recognizes sustained above-average accomplishment and/or superior dedication to duty
- Achievement typically conducted over a relatively short period of time

Commendation Medal (CM)

- Recognizes:
 - Sustained high quality achievements
 - Application of unique skill/creative imagination
 - Noteworthy technical and professional contributions significant to a limited area
- Agency or state level impact (usually)

Criteria for Individual Honor Awards



Outstanding Service Medal (OSM)



- Recognizes:
 - Continuous outstanding leadership in carrying out PHS mission
 - Performance of single accomplishment that had a major effect on public health
 - Performance of a heroic act resulting in preservation of life or health
- National or global level impact

Meritorious Service Medal (MSM)



- Recognizes:
 - Meritorious service of a single, particularly important achievement; or
 - Career notable for significant accomplishments in technical or professional fields
 - Unusually high-quality and initiative in leadership or great courage and heroics in an emergency

Distinguished Service Medal (DSM)



- Highest award granted to a PHS officer
- Recognizes exceedingly high level of achievement by officer with genuine sense of public service
- Impact on global and/or national health



Criteria for Unit Honor Awards

Presidential Unit Commendation (PUC)



- Recognized by the President of the United States for accomplishments and achievements deemed to be of the highest level and importance to protecting, promoting, and advancing the health and safety of U.S. citizens
- National or international impact

Outstanding Unit Commendation (OUC)



- Recognizes group's outstanding contributions toward achieving goals of PHS
- Must have provided outstanding service
- Often national impact

Unit Commendation (UC)



- Recognizes significant accomplishments well above that normally expected
- Unit's accomplishment is at a lesser level than the OUC
- Often state or regional impact

Approval of Awards



- Your Operating Division (i.e., FDA, CDC) has the delegated authority to approve the CIT, AM, CM, OSM, and UC.
 - In some cases, authority to approve the AM and CIT has been further delegated to Bureau, Center, or Area level*
 - Afterward, these award nominations (CIT, AM, CM, OSM, and UC) are submitted to Commissioned Officers' Awards Program (COAP) and processed accordingly.
- The DSM, MSM, and OUC, and awards “with valor” are approved by the Surgeon General after review and recommendation by the PHS Commissioned Corps Award Board (PHS-CCAB).

Commissioned Officers' Awards Program (COAP)



- COAP information:
https://dcp.psc.gov/CCMIS/COAP/COAP_nominations_m.aspx
- Awards requirements
 - Time frame: **13-month window** after the noteworthy act or specific period of service to be recognized – whichever is earlier
 - Formatting requirements for award submissions can vary by Agency Awards Boards
 - Components
 - PHS 6342-1 (Unit) or PHS 6342-2 (Individual)
 - One-page narrative (front and back)

PHS 6342



- PHS 6342-1 (Unit) or PHS 6342-2 (Individual)
([https://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/forms/FORMS awards m.aspx](https://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/forms/FORMS_awards_m.aspx))
- Considerations for PHS 6342
 - Be **specific** when describing your achievement (“Cited For” section of PHS 6342)
 - Citation is limited to 150 characters and **MUST MATCH** narrative citation verbatim

Writing the Award: Effort



- Officers should always be involved in the narrative write-up
 - They know what they did and why it was important!
- Listen to Agency Awards Coordinator
 - They know what will pass and what will not
- Plan on writing/editing multiple iterations
- Spell check AND grammar check

The Narrative



- Most important part of the award
 - Describes what you've done and WHY IT MATTERS
 - Describes your actions (Individual Award) or your unit's action (Unit Award), their impact and significance
- Anyone who reads it should understand what you've done
 - Your audience may be very diverse in background
 - Clear, concise writing is critical



General Format of Narrative

Follow your Agency's formatting standards; however, generally:

- Format
 - Narrative cannot exceed one single-spaced page (back and front)
 - All margins 1"
 - Use of double space between paragraphs and use of bullets is suggested when they can provide clarity
- Font
 - Preferred style is Times New Roman 12 point
 - Comparable font that would provide no less than 12 point and no more than 12 characters per inch can be used

Narrative Sections*



- Introduction
 - Describes what you've been awarded for
 - Citation and time period covered must match the information on the PHS 6342
- Background
 - Provides pertinent background on the issue and any prior or mitigating circumstances
 - Identify nominee's regulatory duties and how the accomplishments are outside expectations of the position
 - Described the public health importance of the issue
 - Descriptive of why action was taken

Narrative Sections (cont.)*



- Accomplishments
 - Include what were the outcomes and impact that were directly attributable to the actions of the officer(s) on the project
 - Section should clarify how achievement is over/above what is normally expected from officer/unit
- Impact
 - State how the outcomes and impact of the accomplishments affected the project
- Conclusion
 - Summary paragraph, reiterating the importance of the project, accomplishment, or activity

Tips on Writing Style



- Clear, concise writing
 - Long sentences are hard to follow (limit sentences to 1-2 lines long)
 - Bullets versus paragraph format (specific to Agency Awards Board)
- Include specific dates and time periods
 - Helps to define the time frame for the described achievement
- Provide specific qualitative/quantitative data
 - Use statistics, examples and other tangible data (e.g., saved resources, money, personnel)
 - Helps readers understand the scale of effort and demonstrate impact of achievement
- Avoid jargon (e.g., collaboration, consensus) and praise language (e.g., enthusiastically, energetically)

What is “Award-worthy”?



Accomplishment = things that were done

- Must be more than just doing your normal duty
- Accomplishment must have “impact”
- Overlap with previous awards
 - Officers may not receive multiple awards for the same accomplishments
 - Officers MAY be awarded a unit award and then submit an individual award for their leadership if there are additional accomplishments and/or impacts
 - A career wrap-up award may also reference previously awarded work
 - If overlap exists, nomination must clarify basis of prior award and relevance to present nomination

Tips for Describing Accomplishments



- Use first person, active voice to describe accomplishments
 - Include specific role
 - Describe what you actually did (including leadership role)
 - Provide qualitative/quantitative data
- For prolonged/extensive efforts, use phrase “For example, . . .”

Tips for Describing Impact



THE BIG QUESTION – SO WHAT?

- Every sentence should read/have implied:
 - “As a result”
 - “Therefore”
 - “Because of”
- Use numbers
 - How much reduction in morbidity/mortality?
 - How much money saved?
 - How many people trained?
 - How much improvement made?

Common Problems



- Accomplishments are too vague
 - Not clear what you actually did
 - Excessive jargon/praise language
- Impacts are not well described, i.e., not clear why your work was important
- Mixed impacts/accomplishments
 - For example, obtaining funding or publishing is generally an accomplishment, not an impact
- Level of proposed award does not match accomplishments
 - Award may be downgraded/upgraded
- Too technical - remember Award Board members have diverse backgrounds

Common Problems (cont.)



- Overlap with previous awards
- Untimely award submission: either too early or too late
 - Must submit award within **13 months** following the end of the last accomplishment
 - Accomplishment is not yet completed (awards cannot be for an **ongoing activity** – it must be completed to show impact)
- Nomination forms are filled out incorrectly or have administrative errors
- Citation and time period covered citation does not match PHS 6342 **exactly**

Special Considerations for Unit Awards



- Remember, **Form PHS 6342-1**
 - Non-PHS officers should be included on award nomination (listed on separate sheet)
- Coordinate with Agency Awards Coordinator to determine Agency's practices/preferences

Awards and Career Planning



- Know your benchmarks
 - Target appropriate award level **before** you go up for promotion
 - Higher level awards require longer periods of time/work
- Continuity of awards
 - Awards do not need to be received in order of precedence
- Remember, unit awards provide value; get involved in team efforts

Summary



- Honor awards are important to your career!
- Approval process varies by Agency
 - Work with Awards Board Coordinator to determine correct process
- Well-written narrative is very important
- Develop an awards “strategy” as part of your career planning
- Plan ahead – know how long the process takes

Important Resources*



- **USPHS Commissioned Corps Instruction: Awards Program, CC511.01– January 2021**
https://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/ccis/documents/CCI_511.01.pdf
- **Personnel Operations Memorandum, POM 821.14, Awards Processing – June 2020**
https://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/ccis/documents/POM08_003.pdf
- **Commissioned Officers’ Awards Program**
[https://dcp.psc.gov/CCMIS/COAP/COAP award criteria m.aspx](https://dcp.psc.gov/CCMIS/COAP/COAP_award_criteria_m.aspx)

Important Resources: Agency Nomination Guidance



- **Consult with Agency PHS Liaisons for Additional Guidance**
- **CDC Guidance on Writing Nominations**
[HRO-CCA - Honor Award Helpful Tools - All Documents \(sharepoint.com\)](#)
- **FDA Awards Nomination Process**
[https://fda.sharepoint.com/sites/OHR-CC/CCAwards/SitePages/Previous New Home Page.aspx](#)
- **NIH Awards Nomination Process**
[https://hr.nih.gov/workforce/commissioned-corps/commissioned-corps-awards](#)