



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 Public Health Service (PHS) 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:

- Represent recognition by the United States (US) of your hard work
- Demonstrate your leadership capabilities, as well as highlight other important abilities
- Career progression – awards are tied directly to the promotion process

http://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/PDF_docs/2015%20SCIENTIST%20Benchmark%20-%20Final.pdf

Awards are worth the time and effort!

Types of Awards



- Honor Awards
 - Individual and Unit Honor Awards
 - General criteria: achievement- and performance-based
 - Officership achievements not usually included
- Service Awards
 - Set criteria: granted in recognition of a specific type of service or activity, or for service during a specific time period
 - Do not go through Agency awards boards
- Campaign Medals
- Training Awards
- Regular Corps Ribbon
- Badges and Insignia

Individual Honor Awards



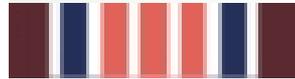
- Six awards for which officers may be nominated:
 - PHS Citation (CIT)
 - Achievement Medal (AM)
 - Commendation Medal (CM)
 - Outstanding Service Medal (OSM)*
 - Meritorious Service Medal (MSM)*
 - Distinguished Service Medal (DSM)*
- Two additional awards for which there is no nomination process (decision to confer is at Surgeon General’s discretion):
 - Surgeon General’s Medallion (SGM)
 - Surgeon General’s Exemplary Service Medal (SGESM)
- **No order** in which an officer must receive these awards.

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

Criteria for Individual Honor Awards

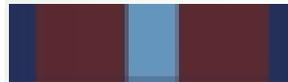


PHS Citation (CIT)



- Recognizes a single, noteworthy achievement
- Typical time frame: Short (1 week to a few months)

Achievement Medal (AM)



- Recognizes sustained above-average accomplishment and/or superior performance
- Typical time frame: 1-2 years

Commendation Medal (CM)



- Recognizes:
 - Sustained high quality achievements
 - Application of unique skill/creative imagination
 - Noteworthy technical and professional contributions significant to a limited area
- Typical time frame: 2 years
- Agency or State level impact (usually)

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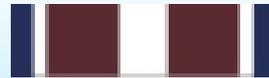


Outstanding Service Medal (OSM)



- 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 level impact
- Typical time frame: 2-4 years

Meritorious Service Medal (MSM)



- Recognizes:
 - Meritorious service of a single, particularly important achievement
 - Career notable for significant accomplishments
 - Unusually high quality and initiative in leadership
- Typical time frame: Several years; this is usually a “career wrap” award

Distinguished Service Medal (DSM)



- Recognizes exceedingly high level of achievement
- Often multi-national impact
- Typical time frame: Several years, but can vary

Unit Honor Awards



Unit Commendation (UC)

- Recognizes an outstanding accomplishment by a designated organizational unit



Outstanding Unit Commendation (OUC)

- Recognizes exceptional service, often of national or international significance, by a designated organizational unit



Approval of Awards



- Your Operating Division (i.e., FDA, CDC) has the delegated authority to approve the OSM, CM, AM, CIT, and UC.
 - In some cases, authority to approve the AM and CIT has been further delegated to Bureau, Center, or Area level.*
- The DSM, MSM, and OUC are approved by the Surgeon General after review and recommendation by the PHS Commissioned Corps Awards Board.
- All awards must be signed off by staff in the Division of Commissioned Corps Personnel and Readiness (DCCPR).

*Please check with your Agency to determine the appropriate Approving Authority for these awards.

Award Requirements



- Components:
 - PHS 6342-1 (Unit) or PHS 6342-2 (Individual)
 - Two page narrative
 - Award history
- Time frame: **13 month window** following the end of the accomplishment to submit the award
- Note, formatting requirements for award submissions can vary by Agency/Awards Board. For example, number of copies, signatures on forms, and narrative format (i.e., bullets versus block paragraphs)

PHS 6342



- PHS 6342-1 (Unit) or PHS 6342-2 (Individual)
- Considerations for PHS 6342:
 - Be **specific** when describing your achievement (“Cited For” section of PHS 6342)
 - Citation is limited to 180 characters and **MUST MATCH** narrative citation verbatim
 - Awards history: may be found on Direct Access or in the officer’s electronic Personal Folder (eOPF)

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 Awards Board Coordinator
 - They know what will pass and what will not
- Plan on writing/editing several iterations
- Spell check AND grammar check

The Narrative



- Most important part of the award
 - Describes what you've done and WHY IT MATTERS
- 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 two single-spaced pages
 - All margins 1"
- Font:
 - Preferred style is Times New Roman
 - 12 point



Narrative Sections*

- Citation/Accomplishment
 - Describes what you've been awarded for
 - Citation and time period covered must match the information on the PHS 6342
- Background
 - Describes the “setting” of the award/conditions that existed prior to the accomplishment
 - Descriptive of why action was taken
- Body/Intervention
 - Includes a specific description of accomplishments/impacts
 - Section should clarify how achievement is over/above what is normally expected from officer/unit
- Conclusion/Outcome
 - Summary paragraph, reiterating the accomplishment and impact (i.e., why you are highly deserving of the award)

Tips on Writing Style



- Clear, concise writing
 - Long sentences are hard to follow (limit sentences to 1-2 lines long)
 - Bullets versus paragraph format (Agency-/Awards Board-specific)
- 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/citation =
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/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
 - 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?

Why are your accomplishments award-worthy?

- 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, members of Awards Boards have broad 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 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**
 - Separate awards history for each officer
 - Non-PHS officers should be included on award nomination (listed on separate sheet)
- Coordinate with Awards Board 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
- Know the importance of award level relative to career
 - For example, a CM for an O-3 is great, but a CIT for an O-6 provides minimal bang for the buck
- 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

Important Resources*



- PHS Commissioned Corps Awards, CCPM Pamphlet No. 67 – April 1998
http://dcp.psc.gov/PDF_docs/CCPM_P67.pdf
- Commissioned Corps Instruction CC27.1.1
http://dcp.psc.gov/eccis/documents/CCPM27_1_1.pdf
- CCMIS Awards Information
<http://dcp.psc.gov/CCMIS/coap.aspx>

* There are other relevant documents on CCMIS website; however, these are the most generally applicable.

Important Resources: Agency Nomination Guidance



- **CDC Guidance on Writing Nominations**
http://intranet.cdc.gov/od/hcrmo/html/commissionedcorps/award_guidelines.html
- **FDA Awards Nomination Process**
<http://inside.fda.gov:9003/EmployeeResources/CommissionedCorps/OfficeofCommissionedCorpsAffairsOCCA/FDACommissionedCorpsAwardsProgram/default.htm>
- **NIH Awards Nomination Process**
<http://hr.od.nih.gov/hrguidance/corps/awards/default.htm>