

## **AWARDS CEREMONY SUGGESTIONS**

Awards should be presented as soon as possible after approval and with appropriate ceremony. Here are some suggestions on how to arrange award ceremonies in the Federal Government. We address some of the many important areas to consider when planning ceremonies, including—

- basic information on the appropriateness of holding ceremonies,
- suggestions on how to organize a successful awards ceremony, and
- the legal authority for conducting awards ceremonies.

This is not intended as a complete guide, but more as a general point of reference as you consider using award ceremonies.

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### **Importance of Ceremonies**

Ceremonies and honors have a value for the organization extending well beyond the individuals recognized. Publicly identifying "organizational heroes" – individuals and groups who embody the organization's core values – is key to their serving as examples and inspiring others. Getting those heroes into the public eye is easily accomplished through both formal and informal ceremonies. Acts and expressions of respect and admiration from ceremony attendees are awards in themselves, and they are among the most powerful nonmonetary awards agencies can grant.

Many agencies use formal, staged awards events with the presence of top agency officials, color guards, etc. to recognize exceptional achievers throughout the agency. However, we need not limit the idea of "ceremony" to such formal events. Less elaborate expression can be equally meaningful, easier to plan for, and offer an attractive low cost option to add flair when granting less formal recognition and awards.

Agencies should recognize employees for their contributions through the presentation of awards at appropriate ceremonies. Normally, the person approving the award or a designee should present the award. Ceremony attendees should include the recipient's coworkers and, when appropriate, members of his/her family.

### **Suggestions for Having a Successful Formal Ceremony**

Careful planning and proper staging are imperative to the success of an agency award ceremony. Here are some general pointers for getting the most value from your awards ceremony.

- Develop a plan of action
- Assemble a team to work as a ceremony committee
- Assign team members to work on specific tasks relating to the ceremony
- Select date, time, and place for the ceremony; be sure to select a time of day that, if possible, will not conflict with regularly scheduled meetings, conferences or lunch hours
- Arrange to have the agency head/other top official present awards
- Hold the event in a large auditorium/facility to permit maximum attendance by coworkers and guests
- Assure proper accommodation for the disabled (e.g., ramps for wheelchairs, an interpreter for the hearing impaired)
- Do plenty of agencywide publicity about award recipients and the upcoming ceremony
- Use a color guard
- Use a musical ensemble
- Arrange to have the agency head or other top agency official speak or arrange an outside speaker who is known to many in the audience
- Distribute to attendees a nice quality brochure with photos, a letter from agency head, and description of employee accomplishments
- Arrange to have a professional photographer take photos of award recipients with top agency officials
- Arrange for a professional caterer to prepare the food (if a reception is planned for the award recipients and their guests)
- Use festive decorations such as balloons, flowers, banners, etc.
- Arrange to have an agency official serve as the master of ceremonies or, if funds permit, arrange for a professional master of ceremonies
- Notify award recipients in advance of the ceremony (let them know if they are expected to make some remarks)
- Prepare recognition items (medals, certificates, award checks, pins, etc.) to be presented to the recipients

### **Authorization for Ceremonial Expenses**

Chapter 45 of title 5, United States Code, authorizes agencies to pay a cash award to, grant time-off to, and incur necessary expense for the honorary recognition of an employee (individually or as a member of a group) and requires the Office of Personnel Management to prescribe regulations governing such authority. Governmentwide regulations cover these kinds of ceremonies by defining award to include "an action taken to recognize and reward."

Agencies should adopt an official policy on the appropriateness of holding receptions in connection with awards ceremonies honoring Federal employees. Such policy should include dollar limitations on the costs of such receptions, as well as guidance stating when a reception is appropriate. (While the act and the legislative history do not address dollar limitations on the necessary expenses that may be incurred, agencies should use discretion in providing for such refreshments under the authority of [5 U.S.C. 4503](#).)

### **Payment of Travel for Attendance at Award Ceremonies**

The agency head or an official specifically authorized under agency delegations of authority may pay for the travel expenses for an employee to receive an award. Agencies also may authorize travel for an individual of the award winner's choosing. That person can be any individual related by blood or affinity, whose close association with the employee is the equivalent of a family relationship. At their discretion, agencies may consider travel reimbursement for more than one individual in instances where the award recipient requires assistance because of a disabling condition. The travel must be directly to and from the site of the ceremony and compensated at the rates and for the expenses authorized under the Federal Travel Regulations ([41 CFR Chapter 301](#)).

When an agency determines that the attendance of an award recipient and his or her supervisor at a local award ceremony would further enhance the recognition, the agency may reimburse both the honoree and supervisor for the cost, if any, of attending the awards ceremony (e.g., local transportation, a luncheon).

Generally, travel reimbursement principally covers instances where the award recipient and his or her guest(s) are both geographically distant from the site of the ceremony. However, agencies may reimburse travel in instances where the award recipient's residence is in the same area as the ceremony and his or her guest lives out of town.

## **Funding**

The Comptroller General has long held that the expenses for conducting ceremonies, including items such as refreshments, meet the concept of "necessary for . . . honorary recognition" authorized under 5 U.S.C. 4503. As such, agencies may charge the cost to operating appropriations without regard to "reception and representation" limits. Summaries of relevant Comptroller General decisions rendered on the "necessary expenses" clause of 5 U.S.C. 4503 follow.

## **SUMMARIES OF RELEVANT COMPTROLLER GENERAL DECISIONS**

### **Refreshments**

66 Comptroller General 536 (1987), B-223895, permits agency expenditures for refreshments at a ceremony conducted under the authority of the Government Employees' Incentive Awards Act as a "necessary expense." (5 U.S.C. 4503)

65 Comptroller General 738 (1986), B-223319, permits agency heads to provide for light refreshments in connection with a ceremony honoring Federal employees, and permits payments of such expenditures from appropriated funds.

### **Travel Expenses**

69 Comptroller General 38 (1989), B-233607, permits agencies to pay travel expenses for the spouse to attend an awards ceremony. When the agency head determines that the presence of the employee's spouse at an award ceremony honoring the employee would further the purposes of the awards program, then agencies may reimburse travel expenses for the spouse as a "necessary expense."

55 Comptroller General 800 (1976), B-166802, permits agencies to pay for the travel of an attendant for a handicapped (disabled) employee who must travel to receive an award provided the employee otherwise would be unable to attend the ceremony.

32 Comptroller General 134 (1957), B-111642, permits agencies to pay travel expenses for a surviving spouse to attend an awards ceremony and receive an award posthumously for a contribution made by the deceased employee.

### **Securing Armed Forces Color Guard and/or Band Combo**

Using a Color Guard during the ceremony sets a tone of formality and importance to the proceedings. You may request the presence of the Color Guard and/or band for your ceremony, free of charge, by contacting the Public Affairs Office at the installation closest to the event. For information about military bands and to find a band located close to the event, refer to the bands' Online Website:

U.S. Army: <http://bands.army.mil/search/activearmy.asp>

U.S. Navy: <http://www.navyband.navy.mil>

U.S. Air Force: <http://www.usafbnd.af.mil/>

U.S. Marine Corps: <http://marineband.usmc.mil>

U.S. Coast Guard: <http://www.uscg.mil/band>