

Farm Production and Conservation Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Performance Management Awards

In FY 2021, USDA transitioned to the new two-tier (pass/fail) performance and awards system using the Enterprise Performance Management Application (EPMA). The USDA Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) provides additional system information in Departmental Regulation (DR) 4040-430, "Employee Performance and Awards," issued on June 24, 2020. References to appendices in this guidance (see attachment) are part of DR 4040-430.

Most of the USDA workforce transitioned to the new pass/fail performance management system, including many Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) employees. With the new pass/fail performance management system, there are achievement awards, including spot awards, individual special act or service/extra effort awards, and time-off awards (TOA) based on FPAC employee accomplishments throughout FY 2023. There will not be FY 2023 rating-based awards for employees who have transitioned to the USDA pass/fail system.

FPAC agencies will fully fund FY 2023 achievement (spot and extra effort) awards from FY 2023 appropriations. The FY 2023 award caps for non-executive (General Schedule and FSA-CO) awards are outlined in the section on FY 2023 Award Spending Limits below. All FY 2023 achievement awards should be entered directly into EmpowHR where approval authority resides within the agency, except for spot awards for FSA CO employees which must be entered into EPIC. The Form AD-287-2, "Recommendation and Authorization of Monetary and Time-Off Awards," will be used when the award requires approval at the Subcabinet or Secretary level, when requesting an award outside of the chain of command, and for FSA CO spot awards. The Form AD-287-2 will be submitted using ServiceNow or emailed to the FPAC Human Resources Division (HRD) Performance Management staff (or emailed to the FSA State Office for FSA field employees) directly to ensure timely processing.

There are some FPAC Bargaining Unit (BU) employees who remain on the five-tier performance system; therefore, they are an exception to the outlined performance awards submission and processing. These employees will remain on the five-tier system until negotiations with their BU is complete, at which time the employees will transition to the two-tier system and use EPMA instead of EmpowHR.

As a reminder, FPAC supervisors with employees who remain under the five-tier system in EmpowHR must ensure equity with those employees that have moved to the two-tier system in EPMA. Specifically, managers must ensure FY23 achievement/performance awards processed for employees, regardless of which performance management system (EmpowHR/EPMA), are distributed fairly and equitably and based upon accomplishments and benefit to the agency.

1. FY 2023 AWARD SPENDING LIMITS

To ensure consistency and fairness across FPAC, award spending for FY 2023 will be limited as follows:

- a) FY 2023 total non-executive (General Schedule and FSA-CO) award spending (e.g., all achievement awards including spot and individual special act or service/extra effort awards) will be capped at 2.5 percent of the respective agency's aggregate salaries (defined as aggregate salaries, not including benefits for onboard non-executive positions as of September 30, 2022). FPAC may spend under the 2.5 percent cap for awards.

FPAC agencies are responsible for actively participating in the awards process for subordinate offices to ensure awards are equitably distributed. Each FPAC agency is responsible for making appropriate use of award funds and ensuring offices stay within their assigned award spending limits and issue awards expeditiously. Managers and supervisors should work with their subordinate offices to ensure these actions occur. Agencies that have expended FY 2023 awards funds on FY 2022 rating-based performance awards should be aware they have already used a portion of their FY 2023 cap.

- b) Because a two-tier summary rating does not differentiate among levels of successful performance, monetary awards and TOAs are not authorized based on ratings of record in a pass/fail summary rating pattern. Instead, non-rating-based achievement awards will be used to recognize specific achievements that support excellence in performance.
- c) Award caps will be provided to each agency under separate memorandum. Award caps include spot awards, individual special act or service/extra effort awards for all employees, and any rating-based awards for five-tier performance management employees. Award caps do not include hourly rate value of time-off awards and dollar equivalents for any Quality Step Increase (QSI).

Achievement awards are non-rating-based awards that recognize specific achievements that are in line with Mission Delivery and have exceeded normal job requirements.

Examples of such achievements include, but are not limited to:

- A high-quality contribution involving a difficult or important project/ assignment.
- A knowledge management product to document the processes for carrying out a significant job function such as a new conservation initiative.
- Initiative and skill in successfully completing an assignment or project before the deadline to the benefit of the program, staff, or customer.
- Initiative and creativity in making improvements to projects, activities, programs, or services.
- Accomplishment of the mission of the work unit during a challenging period by successfully completing additional work or a special project assignment while maintaining the employee's own workload.

2. MONETARY AWARDS AMOUNTS

- a) The minimum monetary award is \$100.
- b) Award amounts must be commensurate with the contribution(s) and consistent with the applicable benefits identified in the appendix (attached Departmental memo).
- c) Award amounts must be given in a fair and consistent manner.
- d) Monetary awards may never exceed 20 percent of the employee's rate of basic pay in a fiscal year. Basic pay does not include locality pay.
 - Tax Implications. Monetary awards are reported as compensation and taxes are withheld accordingly.
 - Pay Implications. A monetary award is a lump sum payment and is not basic pay for any purpose.
 - Gross Pay Amounts.

1. Spot awards are the only USDA awards which are grossed up; meaning the full compensation value of the award is higher than the award amount requested. For example, a supervisor submits a request for a \$500 Spot award. Once the award is processed, the employee receives a deposit for exactly \$500. However, the amount that is deducted from the agency budget includes the \$500, plus all applicable taxes. Due to differing tax rates/laws, an exact multiplier cannot be used to determine the full compensation value of a spot award. For planning purposes, multiplying the spot award request amount by 1.5 provides an estimated amount that would be subtracted from the agency's budget. Budget officials must pull information from the Financial Management Modernization Initiative (FMMI) system to accurately determine the spot award amount to determine remaining account balances. Supervisors should not gross up spot awards to cover taxes. Supervisors should be aware however, that the value of a Spot award is significantly higher than the same requested individual special act or service/extra effort awards or Rating-based award amount.
2. In the case of individual special act or service/extra effort awards or Rating-based awards, the award recipient receives the remainder of the award amount after all taxes have been deducted. For example, when a supervisor submits a request for a \$500 individual special act or service/extra effort award after taxes are deducted the net deposit will be less based on their tax elections (i.e. @ \$350). For budgeting purposes, individual special act or service/extra effort awards and Rating-based award amounts are exact amounts that are subtracted from the budget.

3. ELIGIBILITY

- a) This guidance applies to all General Schedule (GS) and FSA County (CO or non- Federal) employees. Eligibility does not apply to a) Members of the Senior Executive Service (SES); b) Senior Level (SL) and Scientific and Professional (ST) positions; c) Members of the Senior Science and Technology Service; d) Foreign Service employees; and e) Presidential appointees.
- b) Employees whose most recent performance rating is "Pass/Fully Successful" are eligible for achievement (including monetary and time-off) awards; however, employees who were on leave restrictions within the 52 weeks prior to the award effective date are not eligible for a Time Off Award (TOA).
- c) Awards can be given for individual or group contributions.
- d) Employees may receive more than one award within one performance year.

4. JUSTIFICATIONS

The justification in EmpowHR (or on the Form AD-287-2) must clearly state:

- a) The accomplishment of the employee or group.
- b) The time period covered by the accomplishment.
- c) How the achievement exceeded normal expectations of the respective employee's role.
- d) The result or outcome of the accomplishment.
- e) The calculation of benefits, using the appropriate benefits scale (see attached appendix), that describes how the award amount was determined.

Important Note: Supervisors/Managers are responsible for ensuring adequate award justification is included in the award request. Awards requests with insufficient justification will not be processed until the justification meets the above outlined criteria.

5. AUTHORIZATION AND APPROVAL

The provisions in this section apply to all monetary awards and TOAs processed within FPAC, including those for employees who are on reimbursable details outside of FPAC, and irrespective of the funding source.

- a) The recommending official is either the employee's first or second level supervisor of record and is responsible for ensuring an award is not duplicative, as described in Section 6c(4) of DR 4040-430.
- b) The authorizing official is determined by the discrete (single) award amount, as described in the appendix (attached).
- c) Award packages for authorization at the Under Secretary and Secretary levels will not be entered directly into EmpowHR. The award package must include: (1) a decision memorandum from the FPAC agency head, (2) the Forms AD-287-2, and
- d) A thorough justification that documents how the requested amount for an award is commensurate with the contribution (see attached appendix)

Award authorization packages for the Secretary must also be routed through the FPAC Human Resources Division to the FPAC Under Secretary and then through the USDA Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO) and USDA's Assistant Secretary for Administration (ASA).

6. PROHIBITED JUSTIFICATIONS

Monetary awards and TOAs may not be granted as additional compensation or reimbursement of any kind, including scenarios such as:

- a) Forfeited annual leave.
- b) An actual or perceived inequity in salaries and/or the classification of positions.
- c) A substitute for salary dollars as a means of circumventing the annual aggregate limitation on pay.
- d) Performing the normal duties of the position as an excepted, essential, or emergency employee during a furlough, weather-related closure, or similar scenario.
- e) Working outside normal hours when the time should be recorded as compensatory time or overtime.
- f) Denial of a recruitment, relocation, or retention incentive.

7. MULTIPLE AWARDS FOR THE SAME CONTRIBUTION

- a) Supervisors and managers must ensure employees are not receiving duplicative awards for the same contribution. To ensure this is met, award recommendations outside of the supervisory chain of command must be discussed first with the supervisor of record before submitting an additional award request. For example:

- An employee was given an award by his or her supervisor for a customer service contribution, and the office that benefitted from the customer service nominated the employee for a separate award. In this situation, the employee's supervisor should flag the award as duplicative and suggest another form of recognition (e.g., certificate of appreciation).
- b) There are limited circumstances where multiple awards may be appropriate:
- TOAs and monetary awards may be combined for a single award action where the sum of the combined award is commensurate with the contribution(s), and together are consistent with Section 6c(10) of DR 4040-430.
 - If an award is granted, and the benefit of the contribution being recognized is later determined to be greater than originally ascertained, the employee may be granted the difference between the original award and what is subsequently concluded to be the more appropriate amount. The justification for the second award must reference the original award and must describe the basis for determining the combined award amount.
 - Contributions to a large or multi-year project may be recognized at specific milestones, provided: a) the combined amounts for all the associated awards are commensurate with the employee's contributions, consistent with the applicable benefits scale (see attached appendix), and b) the award justifications specify the work being recognized at the respective milestones.

8. TIMELINESS AND EFFECTIVE DATES

- a) Recognition is most effective when it is given as close to the achievement or contribution as possible; however, when timely awards are prohibited (e.g., because of budgetary or process issues or temporary spending freezes), the awards may be processed as soon as practicable once those barriers are resolved.
- b) Effective dates may be no earlier than the date an award is approved by the appropriate approving official (Ref. DR 4040-430) on the Form AD-287-2 or into EmpowHR.
- c) FPAC leadership may consider limiting the awards distribution, both in number and amount, due to budgetary constraints.
- d) Relative comparisons among individuals or groups, such as rank ordering or categorizing employees, may be used for making decisions regarding the distribution of awards.
- e) FPAC may also establish criteria for categories of awards given only to a selected number of recipients who best fit the criteria, although the basic criteria may have been met by more individuals or teams. For example, an agency's Supervisor of the Year award will have basic criteria that sets the threshold for award consideration, and a significant number of supervisors may meet that threshold; however, the individual selected as the Supervisor of the Year will generally be the one who best fits the criteria.

9. AWARDS ACROSS AGENCY LINES

- a) When FPAC agencies wish to recognize an employee of another organization or Federal agency with a monetary award or TOA, the benefiting organization will nominate the employee for the award.

- b) The nominating employee or organization must first check with the supervisor of record before nominating the employee to check for duplication and awareness of the supervisor of record.
- c) The clearance provisions of Section 6c(2) of DR 4040-430 apply to the recommendation and authorization of the award.
- d) If it is a monetary award, the benefiting agency will arrange to reimburse the FPAC agency.
 - This provision may be waived when the agencies agree the administrative costs involved will outweigh the award amount.
 - When an FPAC agency has the capacity to process an award for a contributing employee from another USDA mission area or agency, they may do so after it is authorized to eliminate the need for reimbursement.

10. TYPES OF AWARDS

a) Spot Awards

- 1) Spot awards are lump-sum payments that range in amount from a minimum of \$100 to a maximum of \$750. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) intended spot awards to provide immediate recognition to individual employees who warrant awards for day-to-day extra efforts that support the achievement of the agency's mission.
- 2) All FPAC General Schedule and FSA CO (non-Federal) employees are eligible for spot awards. More than one spot award can be awarded to an individual employee during the performance year. Although spot awards are intended to recognize individual contributions, they may be given for group contributions; however, the overall award amount for each group member must not exceed \$750.
- 3) Spot awards are effective the date they are processed and are received in a separate deposit outside of the normal bi-weekly paycheck.

b) Individual Special Act or Service/ Extra Effort Awards

Individual special act or service awards are commonly referred to as "extra effort" awards. These are monetary awards that recognize individuals or groups who make a significant one-time contribution (e.g., special project, assignment, detail) to FPAC's mission or goals. The award amounts can range from a minimum of \$100 to more than \$10,000, depending on the value of the benefits and the application of the contributions to the Government. Award amounts must be in compliance with appendix D. The awards are processed with an effective date at the start of a pay period and are included in the employee's regular paycheck deposit.

c) Time-Off Awards (TOA)

- 1) TOAs grant employees time-off from duty without loss of pay or charge to leave in recognition of a superior achievement or other personal effort that contributes to the quality, efficiency, or economy of Government operations. TOAs may be approved for 1 up to 40 hours, based on the significance of the contribution, and the "Nonmeasurable and Measurable Benefits Scale" (see attached appendix D and E).
- 2) All full-time and part-time FPAC General Schedule and FSA CO (non-Federal) employees

are eligible for TOAs, except for employees on intermittent work schedules, SES members, and senior-level employees. These awards may not be granted to employees from other USDA agencies, and they may not be transferred from one Federal agency to another Federal agency, except for the following section 8 below.

- 3) Although TOAs are intended to recognize individual contributions, they may be given for group contributions as well. There is no ceiling on the total amount of any group TOA, but the award amount for each group member must not exceed the maximum allowable limits for individuals. TOAs can be combined with monetary awards.
- 4) Employees may carry over up to 80 hours of TOAs at the end of each leave year. Any hours in excess of 80 are forfeited at the end of each leave year.
- 5) Mission area or agency management may not permit the use of TOAs for an entire office to allow all employees the same day off or the same hourly timeframe off.
- 6) The granting of time-off does not increase an employee's "use or lose" annual leave amount, and time-off should be scheduled to not conflict with the use of existing "use or lose" annual leave. Time-off absence is not justification for the restoration of forfeited annual leave.
- 7) Because a TOA is not annual leave, it cannot be transferred to another Federal employee under the Voluntary Leave Transfer Program.
- 8) Employee Reassignments and Transfers:
 - a) If an employee moves within USDA from one mission area or agency to another, the gaining mission area or agency will honor an unused TOA granted by the employee's losing agency.
 - b) If an employee transfers into USDA from another Department or independent Federal agency, the gaining mission area or agency is permitted, but is not required to honor up to 40 hours of an unused TOA granted by the employee's prior agency.

d) Rating-based Awards

Rating-based awards are only authorized for employees who remain under the five-tier (EmpowHR) system and have a summary rating of Superior or Outstanding for FY23. Funding/allocation for rating-based awards will use FY24 funds. Rating-based awards are processed with an effective date at the start of a pay period and are included in the employee's regular paycheck deposit. Additional guidance on Rating-based awards will be issued at a later date.

e) FY 2023 Quality Step Increase (QSI) QSI Allocations

Quality Step Increases (QSIs) for the 2023 performance rating cycle are limited to no more than two percent of non-executive employees on board as of September 30, 2022. If an FPAC agency has a compelling need to exceed the two percent limit, they must submit a decision memo via the Agency Head or designated representative via the FPAC Human Resources Division and the FPAC Under Secretary to the Deputy Secretary for review/approval. This package must contain the following:

- a) The number of employees above the two percent limit for which a QSI is being requested in that FPAC agency.
- b) The proposed QSI distribution across the FPAC agency (not including duty stations for virtual employees), grades and supervisory status.
- c) The overall QSI distribution for the FPAC agency.

- d) The rationale for the additional QSIs.

QSI Constraints

QSIs are reserved for the most exceptional levels of performance. Although there will only be two levels of performance in FY 2023 (pass or fail) for most FPAC employees, the awarding of a QSI will be reserved for employees who have completed achievements that contributed substantially to the organization's goals, commensurate with the classification of their position.

- No single achievement merits a QSI. It may be granted only to those employees who have demonstrated sustained exceptional performance, commensurate with the classification of the employee's position.
- Mission area and agency management reserve the discretion to award a QSI. It is not required or automatically granted to employees who meet the basic eligibility criteria.
- Mission areas and agency management must ensure such decisions are made consistently.

QSI Eligibility

An employee must:

- 1) Occupy a position eligible for Within Grade Increases (WGI) (i.e., General Schedule and FSA CO (non-Federal) employees occupying permanent positions).
- 2) Be at the full performance level of his or her position.
- 3) Be below the step 10 of his or her grade level.
- 4) Have performed in the same grade and type of position for at least 12 months before the end of the appraisal cycle.
- 5) Have demonstrated sustained performance of the highest quality, significantly and demonstrably above the expectations defined at the "Fully Successful" performance plan level.
- 6) Have completed achievements that contributed substantially to the organization's goals, commensurate with his or her position classification.
- 7) Be expected to continue the same high level of performance.
- 8) Not have received a QSI within the previous 52 weeks. A QSI recommendation cannot be effectuated until the 52-week mandatory waiting period is completed.

The process for all QSI approvals, including any additional QSIs approved above the two percent, is the following:

- 1) QSI Review Panels are no longer required. Agencies need to develop guidance for their internal agency processes for review and approval of QSIs. The agency guidance needs to ensure fairness and equity in the determination on QSIs.
- 2) Agencies must determine if the employee is eligible to receive a QSI based upon the FPAC FY23 Award Guidance.
- 3) Agencies must use the AD-3115 "Recommendation and Approval of Quality Step Increase" for QSI approval. Employees must have demonstrated sustained performance of high quality and have received a rating of record of at least Fully Successful for most recent performance year.
- 4) QSIs will be authorized no lower than the SES level.

- 5) Agencies must not exceed the 2 percent QSI caps as outlined in this Farm Production and Conservation Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Performance Management Awards Notice unless approval has been given by the Deputy Secretary as outlined above.
- 6) SES approved AD-3115 forms must be submitted to HRD Performance Management Section (or FSA State Admin) via email, and staff will enter it into EmpowHR. The human resources representative is responsible for expeditiously processing the QSI.

QSI Approval and Effective Date

- 1) The QSI will be designated approved when the SES signs block 18 of the AD-3115
- 2) A QSI becomes effective on the first day of the first pay period on or after it is approved or for FSA CO (non-Federal) employees, by DAFO. QSIs may not be retroactive except to correct an administrative error.
- 3) The deadline to review and make selections by the Agency is September 30, 2023. For bargaining unit QSI submissions, the established procedures will remain in effect.

QSI and Wage-Grade Increase (WGI) Timing

- 1) A QSI does not change the effective date of an employee's normal WGI, except when the QSI places the employee in the fourth or seventh step. At either step, the employee will enter a longer waiting period for the next WGI.
- 2) When a WGI and QSI are effective on the same day, the WGI will be processed before the QSI.
- 3) FPAC agencies may hold a QSI for two pay periods to benefit a high-performing employee, so that it is processed after a pending WGI.

QSI and Promotion Timing

- 1) A QSI must be applied to the rate of pay for the position that the rating of record was based.
- 2) If an employee is granted a QSI based on performance at one grade and is competitively promoted before the QSI is made effective, the QSI cannot be applied to the higher grade.
- 3) A QSI must be processed before any promotion action with the same effective date.
- 4) If the rating of record was based on the employee's performance in a permanent position, and the employee is on a temporary promotion, the QSI cannot be applied to the rate of pay received during a temporary promotion. The employee will receive the QSI after termination of the temporary promotion when the employee returns to the lower-graded position.

11. AWARD TRACKING

Each agency is responsible for tracking awards to ensure funding allocations are not exceeded. Supervisors can view awards processed through EmpowHR Manager Self Service. In addition, HRD can provide awards reports on pending and processed awards. Award reports can be obtained by submitting a request to the agency's servicing Performance Management Specialist.

12. GRIEVANCES AND APPEALS

The granting or failure to grant a monetary or nonmonetary award is at the sole discretion of FPAC

management; therefore, employees may not appeal or grieve decisions to grant or not to grant monetary or nonmonetary recognition, or the dollar amount of monetary recognition, unless there is a claim that alleges FPAC management failed to comply with an appropriate provision of a collective bargaining agreement. Formal and informal recognition must comply with ethical and procurement restrictions as specified in Departmental and Federal regulations.

If you have questions about this information, please contact the FPAC HRD Performance Management Section Chief David Drescher (david.drescher@usda.gov), or Performance Management Specialist Betty Dickens (betty.dickens@usda.gov).

Attachment
DR 4040-430, Appendices D and E

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20250

DEPARTMENTAL REGULATION	NUMBER: DR 4040-430
SUBJECT: Employee Performance and Awards	DATE: June 24, 2020
OPI: Office of Human Resources Management	EXPIRATION DATE: June 24, 2025

Appendix D - Monetary Award and TOA Authorization Requirements
Appendix E - Measurable and Non-Measurable Benefits Scales

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APPENDIX D

MONETARY AWARD AND TOA AUTHORIZATION REQUIREMENTS

Use the following table to determine the authorization requirements for monetary and time off awards.

Table 1. Authorization Requirements

Discrete/Single up to:		Organizational authorization levels are no lower than:
\$750	and/or 8 hours	The immediate supervisor
\$2,000	and/or 20 hours	The 2 nd level supervisor
\$4,000	and/or 40 hours	The first SES in the employee's chain of command
\$6,000	and/or 80 hours	The agency or staff office head
\$8,000		The subcabinet official
\$10,000		The Secretary

- a. An award for a highly exceptional and unusually outstanding suggestion, invention, superior accomplishment, or other meritorious effort exceeding \$10,000 per individual requires the Secretary's approval, as well as authorization from OPM prior to payment. Mission Areas, agencies, and staff offices must consult with OHRM before initiating such a request to ensure it complies with current OPM guidance.
- b. Awards exceeding \$25,000 require Presidential authorization.

APPENDIX E

MEASURABLE AND NON-MEASURABLE BENEFITS SCALES

Use the Measurable Benefits Scale when a contribution, suggestion or invention results in a quantifiable benefit, such as a process improvement that saves a program a particular monetary amount. The benefit is calculated based on the first 52 weeks of the contribution, invention, or of the implemented improvement or suggestion.

Table 2. Measurable Benefits Scale

Benefit	Award
Up to \$10,000	10% of the benefits
\$10,001 - \$100,000	\$1,000 for the first \$10,000 in benefits, plus 3% of benefits over \$10,000
\$100,001 or more	\$3,700 for the first \$100,000 in benefits, plus 0.005% of benefits over \$100,000. Award amount may not exceed 20% of recipient's basic pay.

Use the Non-Measurable Benefits Scales when a contribution, suggestion or invention results in benefits which cannot be readily quantified, such as contributions described in the examples after Table 3.

Table 3. Non-Measurable Benefits Scale for Monetary Awards

Scope	Type of Contribution			
	Limited	Moderate	Significant	Substantial
Level 1	Up to \$250	Up to \$500	Up to \$1,000	N/A
Level 2	Up to \$500	Up to \$750	Up to \$1,500	N/A
Level 3	N/A	Up to \$1,000	Up to \$2,000	Up to \$3,500
Level 4	N/A	Up to \$1,250	Up to \$3,000	Up to \$5,000
Level 5	N/A	Up to \$1,500	Up to \$4,000	Up to \$7,500
Level 6	N/A	Up to \$2,000	Up to \$5,000	Up to \$10,000

Table 4. Non-Measurable Benefits Scale for Time Off Awards

Scope	Type of Contribution			
	Limited	Moderate	Significant	Substantial
Level 1	Up to 4 hours	Up to 8 hours	Up to 16 hours	N/A
Level 2	Up to 8 hours	Up to 10 hours	Up to 20 hours	N/A
Level 3	N/A	Up to 12 hours	Up to 24 hours	Up to 40 hours
Level 4	N/A	Up to 20 hours	Up to 30 hours	Up to 40 hours
Level 5	N/A	Up to 30 hours	Up to 40 hours	Up to 40 hours
Level 6	N/A	Up to 40 hours	Up to 40 hours	Up to 40 hours

Table 5. Key to Types of Contribution

Type	Examples
Limited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Assisted a colleague on a project to help meet a deadline; b. Provided support for a specific initiative by scheduling meetings, tracking documents through approval, following up on deliverable due dates, etc.; c. Served in an “acting” capacity for two pay periods (without a temporary promotion); and d. Served as a team member on a short-term project.
Moderate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Developed an administrative process improvement; b. Provided technical expertise and guidance to a project team; c. Performed an absent colleague’s duties for 60 days, as well as the awardee’s own workload; d. Served as the lead on a short-term project; and e. Served as a fully contributing team member on a large, long-term project.
Significant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Developed a strategic program enhancement which facilitated Mission Area, agency, or staff office decision-making, or improved delivery to external customers; b. Delivered an important project with high quality on a very short timeline; and c. Served as the lead on a large, long-term project, accountable for the results.
Substantial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Led an interagency initiative to develop a new methodology to improve program delivery to USDA’s external stakeholders; and b. Led a research team that developed a ground-breaking agricultural industry innovation.

Table 6. Key to Scope of the Contribution's Impact

Scope	Definitions of Levels
Level 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The operations of the immediate office or Ranger District; b. The employees of an entire State or Region up to 300 employees; or c. Equivalent.
Level 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The operations of a division, service center agency's District or an entire small State or Forest; b. The services delivered to the local community; c. The employees of an entire State, Region, agency, or staff office up to 3,000 employees; or d. Equivalent.
Level 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The operations of an entire medium State or Forest, or a small agency or staff office (up to 3,000 employees); b. The services delivered to an entire small State, or delivered by multiple agencies to the local community or service center agency's entire District; c. A significant mission-centric program delivered State or Forest-wide; d. A subset of the general public equivalent to an entire small State; e. The employees of an entire medium agency (3,001 - 10,000) employees; or f. Equivalent.
Level 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The operations of an entire large State or Forest, multiple States, a Region, an entire medium agency (3,001 –10,000 employees), or all the offices of multiple agencies serving an entire State; b. The services delivered by multiple States, or by multiple agencies to the entire State; c. A mission program delivered agency-wide; d. A subset of the general public equivalent to an entire medium or large State; e. The employees of multiple agencies, or an entire large agency (over 10,000 employees); or f. Equivalent.
Level 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The operations of an entire large agency (over 10,000 employees), multiple agencies, multiple Regions, or a bureau or independent agency outside USDA; b. The services delivered by multiple Regions; c. A program delivered Department-wide; d. A subset of the general public equivalent to multiple States; e. The employees of the entire Department; or f. Equivalent.
Level 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The operations of the entire Department; b. A significant mission-centric program delivered Department-wide; c. The general public of the entire Nation; or d. Equivalent