

Department of Information and Innovation Meritorious Awards Policy

Applicable To: All classified employees of the Department of Information and Innovation

Issued By: Department of Information and Innovation

Approved By: Richard Boes, CIO and Commissioner

Date Approved: June 28, 2012 (Supersedes policy dated January 26, 2012)

- I. **PURPOSE:** This memorandum establishes Department policy and criteria for meritorious awards and promulgates procedures for submission and review of nominations and approval or denial of awards.
- II. **POLICY:** The Department wishes to encourage and reward in a fair and consistent manner classified employees for performance which is substantially above and beyond the established standards and norms for the position that enables or promotes the core values of collaboration, communication, competence and teamwork.
- III. **GENERAL GUIDELINES:** Meritorious awards will be implemented in accordance with this policy, the State Personnel Policies and Procedures, and the Outstanding Performance article of the Agreements between the State of Vermont and the Vermont State Employees Association, Inc.
- IV. **MERITORIOUS AWARDS COMMITTEE:** There is hereby established a Meritorious Awards Committee. The Meritorious Awards Committee (MAC) will consist of at least six members, including the Chair, each appointed by the Commissioner for two-year terms. For purposes of creating the committee, half of the members will serve for one year initially so that only one half of the committee shall change each year going forward. There is no prohibition from serving multiple terms. The Chair will be a member of Senior Management and will be a non-voting member except to break a tie vote. Not more than three members of the committee will be members of the VSEA, and no more than two members of the same work unit may serve at the same time. The remaining members will be managers. The Department Human Resource Administrator will serve on the Committee as a non-voting member. Regular meetings of the Committee will be held quarterly in the months of August, November, February and May. The Chair may call special meetings at any time. Meetings of the Committee may be held in person or by other means as the Committee may choose. The purpose of the Committee will be to review meritorious award nominations for internal equity and consistency, make recommendations on approval of awards to the Commissioner and to review and recommend to the Commissioner changes to the criteria to be followed in evaluating nominations. The Committee will review only those nominations submitted for DII employees covered by the Collective Bargaining Agreements. Each year the Committee will perform an evaluation of the program and submit, by June 30, a Merit Bonus Log/Report to the Commissioner of the Department of Human Resources. The report may offer recommendations for change to improve equity and consistency.

V. TYPES AND CRITERIA FOR MERITORIOUS AWARDS:

A. Nonrecurring Awards: A Nonrecurring Award is a lump sum or cash equivalent award granted on a one-time basis. It does not alter the employee's current hourly rate of pay. There are two types of Nonrecurring Awards:

1. Recognition Award: Recognition Awards are for a range of employee accomplishments and contributions. The distinction between this award and other awards is the length of superior service and the approval process. Recognition awards can be in the form of a monetary award (up to \$500) payable through the payroll system or time off. During the period of time being recognized, the employee's overall performance must have evidence of being satisfactory or higher.

An employee is not eligible to receive more than \$1,000 or 32 hours off in a twelve-month period.

The nomination form must be completed as thoroughly as possible, detailing the circumstances warranting the recognition award, and be forwarded to the Human Resources Administrator for processing. This must also include comments and recommendations from the employee's supervisor, or manager.

2. Bonus: A Non-Recurring Bonus is appropriate for special recognition of exceptional performance on a special project or other short-term (i.e., less than 12 month) activity of major importance to the Department. During the period being recognized, the employee's overall performance must be satisfactory or higher. If the award is being granted for job performance rather than a special project, the nomination must be initiated by the employee's supervisor/manager and at least one critical job element must have evidence of outstanding performance and performance on all other elements must be at least satisfactory. A Non-Recurring Bonus may range from \$500 to an amount not to exceed 8% of the annualized base salary of the employee, payable through the payroll system.

An employee is not eligible to receive more than a total of \$1,000.00 in "small bonuses" and/or total bonuses not to exceed 8% of their annualized base salary in a twelve-month period.

The nomination form must be completed as thoroughly as possible, detailing the circumstances warranting recognition and reward, and be forwarded to the Human Resources Administrator for processing. Supporting documentation may include:

- Comments and recommendations from the employee's supervisor, manager, appointing authority
- Letters of commendation, support, or appreciation that speak to the employee's interactions with other departments, customers, clients, and public or private contacts
- Examples of work products, documentation of achievements, or other forms of documentation as appropriate insofar as it relates to the employee's job performance and the award under consideration.

- Approval from nominee's manager.

B. Merit Step Increase: A merit step increase is a permanent adjustment to salary that advances the step level of the employee by one or two steps. A step increase may be warranted when faster than normal salary advancement is appropriate due to sustained long-term (i.e., at least 12 months for one step and 24 months for two steps) performance that significantly exceeds all standards. During the period of service being recognized (the preceding 12 months for a one step increase, and the preceding 24 months for a two step increase), the employee's performance of all job elements must substantially exceed normal job requirements and be considered outstanding. An employee is not eligible to receive more than one step increase in any 12-month period or two step increases in a 24- month period. The nomination form must be completed as thoroughly as possible, detailing the circumstances warranting the merit step increase and be forwarded to the Human Resources Administrator for processing.

The granting of these awards must be in compliance with the Outstanding Performance Article of the agreements between the State of Vermont and VSEA.

No individual employee may receive a combination of more than one (1) Recognition Award (up to and including \$500.00); one (1) bonus (not to exceed 8% of their annualized base salary) and a step increase during a twelve (12) month period.

VI. Nomination and Awards Procedure: Any department employee may initiate a nomination for an award. An employee may not nominate himself/herself for a meritorious award. An employee nominating another employee for a meritorious award will not discuss the nomination with the nominee unless and until a meritorious award is approved. Nominations shall be submitted to the Department's Human Resource Administrator who shall initiate the review process as described below.

All nominations for a meritorious award shall be consistent with criteria as stated within this policy, shall clearly state the recommended type of award, and shall be well documented. Nominations must be submitted using the attached form. Every nomination must include a narrative that documents the performance which is the basis of the proposed award. All relevant information concerning the nominated employee's job or special project and his/her performance on the same must be included.

- A. The nomination for a Recognition Award shall go to the Human Resource Administrator who will review it for completeness and may return the nomination to obtain further information. The Human Resources Administrator may also reject nominations that are not compliant with this policy. In an effort to be uniform and consistent the Committee reserves the right to recommend a modification of the nominated amount for any Recognition Award Nominations. The review period should generally not exceed 14 calendar days from the date a complete nomination is forwarded for consideration. An employee receiving a Recognition Award shall be given his or her choice of the type of award received consistent with this policy.
- B. The nomination for a Bonus shall go to the Human Resource Administrator who will review it for completeness and forward it to the individual's immediate supervisor for review and recommendation. The nomination must be forwarded through the chain of command and following the approval of the nomination by the nominee's Manager will

be sent to the Committee Chair within 21 days of the date of original submission. If the Chair determines more information is needed, he/she may request that information prior to full Committee review. The Chair will determine whether a special meeting to consider the nomination is warranted, otherwise, the committee will take up the completed nomination at their next regularly scheduled meeting. In an effort to be uniform and consistent the Committee reserves the right to recommend a modification of the nominated amount for any Bonus Award. Nominations. Awards over \$2500.00 will require the presence of the nominator(s) at the Committee meeting in order to verbally explain the nomination and answer questions. The Committee may request additional information. Using the criteria outlined in this Policy, a Bonus must be approved by a majority of the Committee which shall then submit the decision of the Committee to the Commissioner for his or her approval. The Commissioner reserves the right to modify the Committee's decision as he/she deems appropriate.

- C. The nomination for a Merit Step Increase shall go to the Human Resource Administrator who will review it for completeness and forward it to the individual's immediate supervisor for review and recommendation. The nomination must be forwarded through the chain of command and following the approval of the nomination by the nominee's Manager will be sent to the Committee Chair within 21 days of the date of original submission. If the Chair determines more information is needed, he/she may request that information prior to full Committee review. The Chair will determine whether a special meeting to consider the nomination is warranted, otherwise, the committee will take up the completed nomination at their next regularly scheduled meeting. Nominations for any Merit Step Increase will require the presence of the nominator(s) at the Committee meeting in order to verbally explain the nomination and answer questions. The Committee may request additional information. Using the criteria outlined in this Policy, a Merit Step Increase must be approved by a majority of the Committee which shall then submit the decision of the Committee to the Commissioner for his or her approval. The Commissioner reserves the right to modify the Committee's decision as he/she deems appropriate. A Merit Step Increase must also be submitted to the Commissioner of the Department of Human Resources for approval prior to being awarded.

Notification Process - Notification of an award shall first go to the employee's unit Manager. The Human Resource Administrator will complete all paperwork necessary to implement meritorious awards.

- VII. Award Criteria - These criteria shall be used in evaluating employee nominations. In most cases, any one of these behaviors may warrant a Recognition Award. Nominees for bonuses and merit increases will, most likely, exhibit a number of the behaviors.
 - A. Collaboration
 - 1) Makes service improvement suggestions
 - 2) Brings in new information, techniques or materials to support and encourage fresh thinking
 - 3) Takes initiative and calculated risks to try new things
 - 4) Builds enthusiasm and optimism among co-workers to expand their belief in what's possible
 - 5) Encourages individuals to volunteer and get involved in projects that are of special interest in spite of job description
 - 6) Helps others think things through and get "unstuck" so they can act within constraints

B. Communication

- 1) Demonstrates quality public communication
- 2) Increase positive visibility with our customers; promotes mission of the department
- 3) Resolves conflicts through constructive confrontation
- 4) Provides service perceived as quality by both external and internal customers
- 5) Is pro-active rather than reactive
- 6) Writes and prepares documentation that is clear, concise and accurate

C. Competence

- 1) Demonstrates problem solving skills
- 2) Participates in job skill training
- 3) Streamlines tasks
- 4) Eliminates waste or duplication
- 5) Ends unproductive tasks
- 6) Manages work time so as to focus on priority tasks
- 7) Delegates without jeopardizing quality or control

D. Team Work

- 1) Displays a positive attitude toward tasks, public, and co-workers
- 2) Uses humor constructively to keep self and co-workers energized
- 3) Confronts or minimizes negative attitudes and complaints raised by co-workers so a positive climate prevails
- 4) Acts in a manner which results in other workers having a better attitude and working more productively
- 5) Places the needs of the team above his or her individual needs or motivations

Nomination Form: <http://dii.vermont.gov/sites/dii/files/docs/DII-Merit-Form.doc>