

EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AND AWARDS

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To revise Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) policy regarding employee recognition and awards.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This policy updates Part V to take out references that should have been removed in change 19 regarding the use of Professional Standards Boards when processing special advancements for achievement and special advancements for performance. It also updates the policy to exclude physician assistants from being authorized to receive a monetary award in lieu of a special advancement for achievement if they are at the top step of the grade. The pages in this handbook replace the corresponding page numbers in VA Handbook 5017. Revised text is contained in [brackets]. These changes will be incorporated into the electronic version of VA Handbook 5017 that is maintained on the [Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer website](#) and the [VA Publications website](#).
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer, Employee Relations and Performance Management Service (051).
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VA Directive 5017, "Employee Recognition and Awards."
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** None.

CERTIFIED BY:

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

/s/

Guy T. Kiyokawa
Assistant Secretary for
Enterprise Integration

/s/

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Assistant Secretary for
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- i Rating of record is not sufficient to support this requirement unless it was issued within the past 30 calendar days; and
 - ii How the employee's professional contribution that warranted state or national recognition through the issuance of an award benefits VA. Examples of these contributions must be provided; and
 - iii How the employee will apply the knowledge gained in the performance of their job duties.
- b. **Number of Steps.** A step increase not only increases an employee's basic pay but also increases the cost of retirement benefits and Federal Government life insurance for covered employees, and often results in a higher basic pay adjustment upon promotion of the employee. Since a step increase represents an increase in basic pay, this type of recognition may increase an organization's budget well into the future. Therefore, the [approving official] must be fiscally responsible when [] [approving] the number of steps to be granted for each achievement and must carefully assess the value of the employee's contribution to the Agency and its mission. Additionally, the relationship between the number of steps to be granted and amount of pay for each step should also be considered when granting SAAs. A four- or five-step advancement should only be granted in extremely unusual situations when the achievement is deemed to be an exceptional contribution to the Agency and its mission.
- c. **Top Step of the Grade.** Employees at the top step of their grade cannot receive a step increase. Therefore, for those employees who are at the top step of their grade and who also meet all of the criteria for an SAA, the [recommending official] will make a recommendation to the approving official (see Appendix A of this part) as to the amount of a monetary award that may be appropriate based on the value of the employee's contribution to the Agency and its mission. Only employees at the top step of their grade may receive a monetary award in lieu of an SAA. Registered nurses[,] certified registered nurse anesthetists [and physician assistants] who obtain a specialty certification and are at the top step of the grade will only be granted a monetary award under the provisions of paragraph 10(b) of this part; they are not eligible for a monetary award in lieu of an SAA for obtaining a specialty certification. All monetary awards will be documented on [VA Form 4659](#).
- d. **Criteria.** [] [L]ocal facilities may develop criteria to assist with the consistency of application when [management officials] recommend the awarding of SAAs. However, servicing Human Resources (HR) offices are responsible for ensuring all criteria are met for each award submission.
- e. **Discretion.** Approving officials may approve or disapprove awards, at their discretion, for non-discriminatory reasons, e.g., budget limitations, disagreement with the value of the contribution made by the employee to the Agency or its mission.

must have demonstrated a sustained high level of performance and demonstrate exceptional skills and aptitudes in the care and treatment of patients.

- c. **Registered Nurses, Physician Assistants, Nurse Anesthetists and Expanded-Function Dental Auxiliaries.** An advancement of one step within the grade may be granted to covered employees when there has been a demonstrated sustained high level of performance and ability over and above that normally expected of employees in the particular grade and profession. (See **NOTE** below.) In addition, for registered nurses and nurse anesthetists one or more of the criteria listed in [VA Handbook 5005, Staffing](#), must be met.
- d. **Hybrid-Title 38 Employees in Occupations Identified in [38 U.S.C. § 7401\(3\)](#).** The QSI provisions in Part III, paragraph 3 of this handbook will be used to grant one-step SAPs for employees in occupations listed under [38 U.S.C. § 7401\(3\)](#). The step increase will be coded as 894G. [] [R]ecommendations will be forwarded directly to the appropriate approving official listed in Appendix A of this part. (See **NOTE** below.)
- e. **Discretion.** Approving officials may approve or disapprove awards, at their discretion, for non-discriminatory reasons, e.g., budget limitations, disagreement with the value of the contribution made by the employee to the Agency or its mission.
- f. **Combination Award.** Employees may receive a superior performance award and an SAP, but the amount of the award cannot exceed the value of the accomplishment. Refer to Part I, paragraph 4 of this handbook for additional information.

NOTE: Individuals at the top step of their grade cannot receive an increase to basic pay; however, they may be recognized with a superior performance award in accordance with Part III of this handbook.

8. PROCESSING AND DOCUMENTING SAP.

a. General.

- (1) At least 90 calendar days prior to optometrists and chiropractors completing the waiting period for a periodic step increase or rate adjustment, HR will notify the appropriate official that the employee is eligible for consideration of an SAP.
- (2) The immediate supervisor or higher-level official will submit appropriate justification as outlined in paragraph 8 of this part with a completed VA [Form 4659](#), the performance appraisal or proficiency rating, and generate an SF-52. The award nomination will be forwarded to the service chief or equivalent, or Chief of Staff or Associate Director or Associate Director of Patient Care Services, who will submit it to HR. The complete nomination