United States
Public Health Service
Commissioned Corps
Honor Awards:
The Basics of Award Write-ups

Last updated: December 2020
Objectives

This presentation provides officers the tools to:

1. Understand the importance of United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps 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:

• Recognition by the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) for your hard work

• Demonstrate your leadership capabilities, as well as highlight other important essential abilities

• Career progression - awards are tied directly to the promotion process ([Category Benchmarks - general link](https://example.com))

*Awards are worth the time and effort!*
Types of Awards

• Honor Awards
  – Individual and Unit Honor Awards
  – General criteria: achievement- and performance-based

• Service Awards
  – Set criteria: granted in recognition of a specific type of service or activity, or for service during a specific time period

• 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)*

• Four additional awards for which there is no nomination process (decision to confer is at Surgeon General’s discretion):
  – Assistant Secretary for Health’s Exceptional Service Medallion (ASHM)
  – Assistant Secretary for Health’s Exceptional Service Medal (ASHESM)
  – 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
- Achievement typically conducted over a short period of time

Achievement Medal (AM)

- Recognizes sustained above-average accomplishment and/or superior performance
- Achievement typically conducted over a relatively short period of time

Commendation Medal (CM)

- Recognizes:
  - Sustained high quality achievements
  - Application of unique skill/creative imagination
  - Noteworthy technical and professional contributions significant to a limited area
- Agency or State level impact (usually)
Criteria for Individual Honor Awards

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

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

Distinguished Service Medal (DSM)
- Highest award granted to a Corps Officer
- Recognizes exceedingly high level of achievement
- Often multi-national impact
Criteria for Unit Honor Awards

Presidential Unit Commendation (PUC)
- Recognized by the POTUS for accomplishments and achievements deemed to be of the highest level and importance to protecting, promoting, and advancing the health and safety of the citizens of the United States
- National or International Impact

Outstanding Unit Citation (OUC)
- Recognizes exceptional service, often of national or international significance, by a designated organizational unit
- Often National Impact

Unit Commendation (UC)
- Recognizes a significant accomplishment by a designated organizational unit
- Often State or Regional Impact
Approval of Awards

- Your Operating Division (i.e., FDA, CDC) has the delegated authority to approve the CIT, AM, CM, OSM, and UC.
  - In some cases, authority to approve the AM and CIT has been further delegated to Bureau, Center, or Area level*
  - Afterwards, these award nominations (CIT, AM, CM, OSM, and UC) are submitted to Commissioned Officers’ Awards Program (COAP) and processed accordingly.

- The DSM, MSM, and OUC are approved by the Surgeon General after review and recommendation by the PHS Commissioned Corps Award Board (PHS-CCAB).

*Please check with your Agency to determine the appropriate Approving Authority for these awards.
Commissioned Officers’ Awards Program (COAP)

- COAP information: https://dcp.psc.gov/CCMIS/COAP/COAP_nominations_m.aspx

- Awards requirements
  - Time frame: **13-month window** following the end of the accomplishment to submit the award
  - Formatting requirements for award submissions can vary by Agency Awards Boards
  - Components
    - PHS 6342-1 (Unit) or PHS 6342-2 (Individual)
    - One-page narrative
PHS 6342

- PHS 6342-1 (Unit) or PHS 6342-2 (Individual) ([https://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/forms/FORMS_awards_m.aspx](https://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/forms/FORMS_awards_m.aspx))

- Considerations for PHS 6342
  - Be **specific** when describing your achievement (“Cited For” section of PHS 6342)
  - Citation is limited to 150 characters and **MUST MATCH** narrative citation verbatim
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 Agency Awards 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
  – Describes your actions (Individual Award) or your units action (Unit Award), their impact and significance

• 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 one single spaced page
  – All margins 1”
  – Use of double space between paragraphs and use of bullets is suggested when they can provide clarity

• Font
  – Preferred style is Times New Roman 12 point
    • Comparable font that would provide no less than 12 point and no more than 12 characters per inch can be used
Narrative Sections*

• Introduction
  – Describes what you’ve been awarded for
  – Citation and time period covered **must match** the information on the PHS 6342

• Background
  – Provides pertinent background on the issue and any prior or mitigating circumstances
  – Identify nominee’s regulatory duties and how the accomplishments are outside expectations of the position
  – Described the public health importance of the issue
  – Descriptive of why action was taken

*The format can vary by agency Please refer to your Agency Awards Board for specific guidance..
Narrative Sections (cont.)*

• Accomplishments
  – Include what were the outcomes and impact that were directly attributable to the actions of the officer(s) on the project
  – Section should clarify how achievement is over/above what is normally expected from officer/unit

• Impact
  – State how the outcomes and impact of the accomplishments affected the project

• Conclusion
  – Summary paragraph, reiterating the importance of the project, accomplishment, or activity

*The format can vary by agency. Please refer to your Agency Awards Board for specific guidance..
Tips on Writing Style

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

• 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 = 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 and/or 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 accomplishments
  – 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?

• 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 Award Board members have diverse 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**
  – Non-PHS officers should be included on award nomination (listed on separate sheet)

• Coordinate with Agency Awards 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

• 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, CC511.01– April 2020
  https://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/ccis/documents/CC511_01.pdf
- Personnel Operations Memorandum, POM 821.14, Awards Processing – June 2020
  https://dcp.psc.gov/ccmis/ccis/documents/POM08_003.pdf
- Commissioned Officers’ Awards Program
  https://dcp.psc.gov/CCMIS/COAP/COAP_award_criteria_m.aspx

* There are other relevant documents on CCMIS website; however, these are the most generally applicable.
Important Resources: Agency Nomination Guidance

- Consult with Agency PHS Liaisons for Additional Guidance
- CDC Guidance on Writing Nominations
- FDA Awards Nomination Process
- NIH Awards Nomination Process
  http://hr.od.nih.gov/hrguidance/corps/awards/default.htm