

## EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AND AWARDS

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To revise Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) guidance concerning costs of VA honor awards and the forms of recognition for the Secretary's honor awards.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook contains mandatory procedures on employee recognition and awards. The pages in this issuance 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 Human Resources Management Web site](#). This revision deletes the dollar value guidance for costs of VA honor awards and adds flexibility to the type of recognition provided to the Secretary's honor awards recipients.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Employee Relations and Performance Management Service (051), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management.
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VA Directive 5017, Employee Recognition and Awards.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** None.

**CERTIFIED BY:**

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

/s/  
Stephen W. Warren  
Executive in Charge and Chief Information Officer  
Office of Information and Technology

/s/  
Gina S. Farrisee  
Assistant Secretary for  
Human Resources and Administration

ELECTRONIC DISTRIBUTION ONLY



**PART IV. HONOR AND NON-MONETARY AWARDS**

**1. VA HONOR AWARDS.** These awards include a suitably inscribed certificate, plaque, desk or office item or other similar item that has an honor connotation. Honorary awards are an integral part of the Department's recognition and awards program and are available in a variety of forms to recognize a wide range of one-time or career achievements. As with other forms of recognition, these awards can also be used to support the achievement of organizational goals and objectives and should be incorporated as much as possible into organizational awards programs. The costs associated with granting these awards can be minimal and, depending on the level of approval and presentation as well as the method of presentation, their value as a motivator can be significant. Honor awards are distinguished from non-monetary awards by the criteria, level of the official approving and presenting the award and the few numbers of these awards granted. [ ] (See appendix A of this part and appendix C of part III for information on traditional honor awards and other creative honor awards that have been used.)

**a. Secretary's Honor Awards Program**

(1) The Secretary approves and personally presents a number of awards to employees or groups of employees in recognition of exceptional efforts that support VA's mission, distinguished VA or Federal careers, outstanding community service and for acts of heroism. A listing of these awards, along with criteria and nominating procedures, appears in appendix A of this part. In addition to awards that recognize VA employees, the Secretary also recognizes contributions by private citizens or private organizations who make contributions in support of VA's mission.

(2) Awards Liaisons will prepare VA Form 50-1, Request for Security Clearance, on all employees in their organization being recommended for an award by the Secretary. In unique or unusual circumstances, a request to waive this requirement with appropriate justification may be made to the Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration.

**b. Organizational Honor Awards Programs.** Key VA officials are strongly encouraged to establish honor awards programs to supplement those granted by the Secretary which primarily focus on significant contributions to the goals and objectives of their organization. A listing of some of these awards, along with criteria, appears in appendix A of this part.

**c. Service Recognition**

(1) **Length of Service.** While not technically an award because an employee need not perform above job requirements to be recognized, service recognition is an accepted part of VA's employee recognition and awards program. Service pins and certificates are available starting with 10 years of service through 50 years at 5-year intervals and should be presented as close as possible to the employee's anniversary date.

**NOTE:** *Service Awards at 50 years or above are from the Secretary. (See appendix A of this part for information on processing service awards for 50, 55, 60 and 65 years of service.)*

(2) **Approving Officials**

(a) Key officials are authorized to present other non-monetary items, particularly for service of 30 years or more, in addition to the VA-wide pins and certificates.

**NOTE:** *Cost implications of providing such items should be considered, particularly for the lower years when a large number of employees will reach these milestones.*

(b) Key officials will sign service award certificates or may redelegate this authority to a lower level.

(3) **Service Computation.** Credit is given for all Federal service, both creditable military and civilian. The length of service is based on the employee's service computation date except for retired members of the uniformed services.

(4) **Recognition at the Time of Retirement.** Since awards are intended to not only recognize employees for their special efforts, but are intended to motivate the recipient and others who witness the presentation, generally it is inappropriate to reward employees monetarily when they leave VA service either through retirement or separation. It may be fitting and appropriate to consider awarding some form of honor or nonmonetary award in recognition of their dedicated efforts to support VA's mission. Several options are available to recognize an employee leaving VA. The type of recognition chosen and the level at which it is approved should correspond to the scope and importance of career achievements and/or the level of dedication and exceptional service to VA.

(a) **Retirement Certificate (and matching pin).** The retirement certificate can be given to any employee leaving VA service through retirement. The retirement pin may also be given.

(b) **Certificate of Commendation.** A certificate, bearing a personalized citation and signed by a key official for significant contributions to an organization or the Department.

(c) **Outstanding Career Award.** A certificate with generic citation which recognizes outstanding accomplishments either within or outside normal job requirements over a prolonged period of time.

(d) **Exemplary Service Award (formerly Honor Award).** A certificate, bearing a personalized citation and signed by the head of an organization, presented for contributions of major significance to an organization or the Department. Typically, if given at retirement, the award recognizes exceptional career contributions.

(e) **Distinguished Career Award.** A certificate, bearing a generic citation, suitably framed[, and an appropriate recognition item, if applicable.] This award recognizes an individual who has made significant contributions that have VA-wide or national impact. [If a recognition item (e.g., medal, lapel pin, etc.) is given, it should be commensurate with the level of the employee's contribution.]

d. **Documentation.** Unless otherwise indicated, recommendations for Honor Awards are submitted on VA Form 4659.

1. SECRETARY’S HONOR AWARDS\*

Type of Award	Eligibility	Criteria	Form of Award	Due Date
Exceptional Service Award	Any VA employee or group of VA employees	In recognition of outstanding contributions of major significance to VA, the Federal Government or the Nation, including exceptional leadership, skill or ability in administration of a major program, extraordinary initiative or creativity in the development of a major improvement; exceptionally successful use of human resources as evidenced through high workforce productivity, a major contribution to science and technology, an exceptional contribution in the public interest related to official employment or exceptional accomplishment significantly contributing to VA’s mission. <b>NOTE:</b> <i>Award is not to be used as a retirement or farewell award unless cumulative career achievements warrant this high level of recognition.</i>	[ ] Citation signed by the Secretary and framed. [An appropriate recognition item may also be provided, such as a lapel pin, medal, etc.] When granted to a group, the group will receive one award and no [additional recognition item] will be provided.	At any time a contribution meeting criteria has been made. Nominees for this award could have received Meritorious Service Award.
Meritorious Service Award	Any VA employee or group of VA employees	Granted in recognition of significant contributions to the Department that approach but do not meet the standards for the Exceptional Service Award. Typically these awards are used as a stepping stone to receipt of VA’s highest honor, the Exceptional Service Award.	[ ] Citation signed by the Secretary and framed. [An appropriate recognition item may also be provided, such as a lapel pin, medal, etc.] When granted to a group, the group will receive one award and no [additional recognition item] will be provided.	At any time a contribution meeting criteria is made.
Distinguished Career Award	Any VA employee who is retiring or departing VA	This is the highest award that can be given to an employee leaving the Department and recognizes cumulative achievements of an employee who has rendered truly distinguished service throughout a VA career. It may be granted for accomplishments over a prolonged period involving the exercise of authority or judgment in the public interest and in advancement of VA’s mission or for professional, scientific, or administrative achievement that received widespread recognition both within and outside of VA. Nomination should cite tangible evidence of employee’s contributions to VA. It is expected that individuals nominated for this award will have received other recognition during their career.	[ ] Citation signed by the Secretary and framed. [An appropriate recognition item may also be provided, such as a lapel pin, medal, etc.]	Any time an employee meeting criteria leaves VA.