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OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET  
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THE DIRECTOR

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MEMORANDUM FOR HEADS OF EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

FROM: Mick Mulvaney  
Director

SUBJECT: Gears of Government Awards Program

The President's Management Agenda (PMA) issued on March 20, 2018, sets forth a long-term vision for a modern, effective Government that works on behalf of the American people. It is a multi-generational vision in which the Federal Government continues adapting to changing needs over time. Federal employees, who underpin nearly all the operations of the Government and ensure the smooth functioning of our democracy, will play a pivotal role in achieving this vision.

While most Americans will never meet the President or even their Member of Congress, they will interact with the Federal employees who work in their community, keep them safe at airports, or welcome them to a national park. This includes regional offices of the Departments of Agriculture and Interior that provide services to farmers and ranchers where they live. When emergencies occur, entities like the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Coast Guard, and the Small Business Administration help to save and rebuild communities. To support and promote the outstanding work of Federal Government employees in carrying out their critical missions, the Administration is launching the annual Gears of Government Awards Program.

### **Background**

The Gears of Government Awards will recognize individuals and teams across the Federal workforce, both within and across agencies, whose performance and dedication support exceptional delivery of key outcomes for the American people: mission results, customer service, and accountable stewardship.

**Mission:** The American people count on the Federal Government every day, from national security to infrastructure to food and water safety. Public servants must be accountable for mission-driven results and have the necessary tools to deliver.

**Service:** Federal customers range from small businesses seeking loans, to families receiving disaster support, to veterans owed proper benefits and medical care. They deserve a customer experience that compares to—or exceeds—that of leading private organizations.

**Stewardship:** Effective stewardship of taxpayer funds is a crucial responsibility, from preventing fraud to maximizing impact. Taxpayer dollars must go to effective programs that efficiently produce results.

In some cases, support for these outcomes is direct and immediate—for example, connecting veterans with hard-earned benefits and care, or working to control wildfires that burn in our forests. In other cases, support comes from the underlying “gears” of Government, which can determine whether operations are efficient and effective or slow and unresponsive. Three specific drivers—or gears—of a modern Government include:

**Information technology (IT)** that functions as the backbone of how Government serves the public in the manner it expects, and maintains the security of sensitive data and systems.

**Data, accountability, and transparency** that provides the tools to deliver visibly better results to the public and hold agencies accountable to taxpayers.

**The workforce** whose skills need to align with evolving mission needs, requiring more nimble and agile management that includes reskilling and redeploying existing workers to keep pace with an environment of change.



## Guidance

Throughout the year, agencies and Executive councils should recognize outstanding staff who exhibit the values and create success in any of the three outcome areas of mission, service, and stewardship or the three key drivers of IT modernization; data, accountability, and transparency; and the workforce. In particular, agencies and councils may consider staff who make outstanding contributions related to the themes of the Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) Goals and Agency Priority Goals. Each May, the Executive Office of the President will select a few of these award recipients to receive the additional Gears of Government President’s Award.

These awards are modeled upon the previous Federal Customer Service Awards, which are now a component of these broader Gears of Government Awards. Therefore, this memo supersedes the guidance provided in OMB Memorandum M-15-09, Guidance on Implementing the Federal Customer Service Awards Program (March 19, 2015).

The attached guidance provides direction to agencies and councils regarding the program, as well as associated deadlines. Questions regarding this memorandum can be directed to Mark Bussow (mbussow@omb.eop.gov) in OMB's Office of Performance and Personnel Management.

## **I. Gears of Government Awards Program**

**A. Overview.** The President’s Management Agenda (PMA) issued on March 20, 2018, sets forth a long-term vision for an effective Government that works on behalf of the American people. It contains a multi-generational vision for Government reform that would enable the Federal Government to continue adapting to changing needs over time. To support and promote the outstanding work of Federal employees in carrying out these critical initiatives, the Administration is launching an annual Gears of Government Awards Program. The Gears of Government Awards are focused on the three outcome areas that a modern, effective Government seeks to deliver for the American people. The awards recognize that contributions may tie directly to these outcome areas or may support them through the three key drivers of change: IT modernization; data, accountability, and transparency; and developing the workforce of the future.

The Gears of Government Awards Program recognizes, promotes, and rewards the excellence, professionalism, and outstanding achievements of Federal employees, teams, and programs. The awards also help recognize and identify effective practices that can be replicated within and across Federal agencies. It is important to recognize outstanding civil servants who are the face of the Federal Government to millions of citizens.

**B. Applicability.** The 24 agencies subject to the Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act are expected to participate by recognizing award winners and notifying the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) of awardees for consideration of annual President’s Awards. Executive councils (e.g., President’s Management Council, Chief Financial Officers Council, Chief Information Officers Council, etc.) are also expected to recognize cross-agency award winners. Participation by non-CFO Act agencies is optional.

**C. Awards Program.** The Gears of Government Awards Program recognizes the accomplishments made by outstanding Federal employees and programs that deliver exceptional mission, service, and stewardship outcomes to the American people.

1. **Award classifications.** Awards will be presented to recognize contributions related to any of the three outcome areas:

- **Mission Achievement**
- **Customer Service**
- **Stewardship**

2. **Award levels.** For each category, awards will be presented at two levels:

- **[Secretary's/Administrator's/Commissioner's/Director's/Chairman's] Award** ("Agency" or "Council" Award)

An agency-level award (at least two but no more than 25 per agency annually, depending on the size of the agency and mission scope) is provided by the agency

head, using a process designed by each agency consistent with this guidance and agency policies.

A council-level award (at least one but no more than five per council annually) is provided by the chair of the council, consistent with this guidance and applicable policies.

- **President's Award**

A Government-wide award presented to approximately 10 – 20 Agency/Council Award recipients annually.

The Gears of Government Awards Program provides recognition, but not monetary awards. Agencies and councils have discretion within their legal and regulatory policies to offer monetary awards as an enhancement to this program.

3. **Award types.** Awards can be presented to individuals or small teams:

- **Individual Award:** Recognizing individuals whose specific accomplishments, professionalism, and commitment to mission, service, or stewardship outcomes—either directly or through the three drivers of change—make them a role model for other employees.
- **Initiative Award:** Recognizing initiatives that have directly improved mission, service, or stewardship outcomes—either directly or through the three drivers of change—through the application of technology, improvements in operations, or other innovations.
  - Initiatives must demonstrate a tangible improvement, even if they are indirect in their impact. For example, this may include improvements to services provided to internal agency customers that manifestly result in improvements for external customers. General efforts to improve operations or program effectiveness, while valuable, do not qualify for an initiative award unless their ultimate impact on improving mission, service, or stewardship outcomes can be clearly identified.
  - A limited number of key individual contributors will be identified as the named recipients of an initiative award (in general fewer than five), which will also recognize the contributions of a broader team.

4. **Process Timeline.** The program will follow the following generic annual timeline. The first Gears of Government Awards ceremony will be held in May 2019.

Deadline	Action
January – December	<b>Agencies/Councils select and present Agency/Council Awards to staff.</b> To the extent practicable, agencies should provide awards on a rolling basis throughout the calendar year.
December 31	<b>Last date for issuance of Agency/Council Awards to be considered for the forthcoming President’s Awards ceremony.</b>
January – February	<b>Agency/Council awardees considered for President’s Awards.</b> OMB staff will review Agency/Council Award recipients from the previous calendar year to select those they will recommend to receive the President’s Award.
March – April	<b>Final selections announced.</b> The recommendations will then be reviewed by the Executive Office of the President and final award recipients will be selected by OMB's Deputy Director for Management, in consultation with the CAP Goal leaders, as appropriate. Approximately 10 - 20 recipients will be selected annually, though the actual number will depend on the quality of the nominees.
May	<b>Gears of Government Awards ceremony conducted.</b> Awards ceremony may be coordinated to coincide with Public Service Recognition Week.

- 5. Branding, Communications, and Marketing Support.** OMB will provide a uniform template to be used for Agency/Council Awards and other supporting materials on [MAX](#). Communicating and recognizing award recipients is an important element of the Gears of Government Awards. OMB communications support will post and publicize awards on key websites such as Performance.gov, and welcome submission of images and videos that can be used as part of ongoing branding and marketing activities.

**D. Agency/Council Awards.**

- 1. Agency/Council Responsibilities.** Each agency/council is responsible for designing its own nomination and award process that meets the requirements and intent of this guidance while also adhering to their individual policies and guidelines for an awards program, which may include consulting with union representatives and following statutory and regulatory requirements.

Each agency/council should designate a primary point of contact to be the liaison with OMB for the Gears of Government Awards Program.

- 2. Program Design.** In general, agency/council programs should meet the following guidelines:
  - At least two, but no more than 25, Agency Awards shall be presented annually per agency, depending on the size of the agency and scope of contributions related to the President’s Management Agenda, to ensure the selectivity of the program.
  - At least one, but no more than five, Council Awards shall be presented annually per Executive council.
  - Agencies/councils should, to the extent practicable, provide opportunities for non-agency stakeholders (i.e., customers) to directly nominate individuals or initiatives for awards.

- Awards should be submitted, reviewed, and presented on a rolling basis by the agency/council, to the extent practicable, to ensure close proximity to the interaction for which the employee(s) is being recognized.
  - Awards should be named the "[Secretary's/ Administrator's/Commissioner's/Director's/Chairman's] Award" and carry the Gears of Government Awards Program branding, in addition to any appropriate agency branding.
  - The head of the agency/council should officially select and provide recognition to award recipients, whether through participation in periodic or annual award ceremonies, notes to recipients, or other appropriate recognition. At a minimum, the highest official within the recipient's office/branch/department/council should present the recipient with the Award. Agencies may have existing awards ceremonies and may include the presentation or recognition of the Agency Awards at the same time.
  - Award programs may be agency-wide, or may leverage existing awards programs and processes at a bureau-level. If leveraging bureau-level processes, agencies should take measures to maintain consistency, as appropriate.
  - Award recipients will receive a physical award (e.g., plaque, certificate) with program branding, which will be provided to agency heads from OMB.
3. **Individual Awards.** All Federal employees in good standing are eligible for the Individual Award, and agencies have the discretion to present awards to individuals working on contracts or for non-Federal partners providing services directly on behalf of the Federal government, within existing laws and regulations (including the Federal Acquisition Regulations). Agencies have flexibility to determine the specific criteria for granting these awards. This could be through a single "heroic" act, or the results of sustained achievements.

While individuals may be identified as a result of a specific action, awards recipients should also demonstrate a strong commitment to public service in all of their work, be well regarded in terms of their general integrity, and display values appropriate as an inspiration and role model.

4. **Initiative Awards.** The Initiative Award will recognize innovations and sustained improvements that enable agencies to address the key drivers of reform. Initiatives should demonstrate direct and tangible improvements. These initiatives are often the result of the contributions of many, but are driven by a limited number of dedicated individuals. To recognize this, the Initiative Award should be presented to a limited number (in general fewer than five) named recipients whose individual contributions are recognized as the most significant to the initiative's success. In addition, the Initiative Award should recognize the contributions of a broader set of teams and organizations that supported the initiative and contributed to its success. The named recipients should be those whose day-to-day work was most critical to the initiative, not necessarily the head of the office or organization.

5. **Award Selection Criteria.** The following general criteria should be considered for agency/council award selection:

- Achievement of positive, measurable outcomes, which may include supporting Agency Priority Goals and Cross-Agency Priority Goals;
- Quality of communication and coordination with internal and external stakeholders;
- Scope of impact on staff/customers/agency mission and/or the significance of the services to those staff/customers/agency mission;
- Awardee's persistence in overcoming obstacles to achieve successful outcomes;
- Extent to which the individual or initiative exemplifies excellence in public service; and
- Particular consideration should be given to regional, field, and/or customer-facing staff, as well as diversity across mission areas and components of award recipients.

6. **Submission of Award Recipients to OMB.** When an agency/council selects an award recipient, prior to issuance of the award, the agency/council's designated point of contact should provide OMB with:

- A brief overview of the award justification and the accomplishments for which the recipient is being recognized, specifically highlighting contribution towards mission, service, or stewardship;
- Attachments or links to images, videos, multimedia demos, etc., that showcase or demonstrate the recipient's work, if available;
- Whether agency/council leadership believes the awardee's contributions are significant enough to warrant consideration for the President's Award; and
- A key point of contact that is familiar with the awardee's contributions that can answer any questions.

Submissions should be sent to [GearsofGovernmentAwards@EOP.eop.gov](mailto:GearsofGovernmentAwards@EOP.eop.gov). OMB will review submissions over a 10-day negative consent period. If the agency does not hear back from OMB within 10 business days, then the agency may proceed with issuance of the award.

7. **Announcement of Award Recipients.** In addition to the information provided to OMB for possible government-wide posting, such as on Performance.gov, agencies/councils are encouraged to highlight award recipients through communications mechanisms such as internal agency forums, public events, newsletters, and blog posts.

These communications may take many forms, but the highest impact communications are often those that highlight a personal story and connect it to the larger narrative. Agencies are encouraged to share the individual stories of these outstanding Federal employees and the impact they are creating for the American public. When doing so, agencies are encouraged to use the #MyFedStory hashtag.

## **E. President's Awards.**

- 1. Selection Process.** President's Award recipients will be selected annually and will be administered by OMB's Deputy Director for Management. In October of each year, OMB staff will review Agency/Council Award recipients from the previous calendar year to select those they will recommend to receive the President's Award. The recommendations will then be reviewed by the Executive Office of the President and final award recipients will be selected by OMB's Deputy Director for Management, in consultation with the CAP Goal leaders, as appropriate.

Approximately 10 - 20 recipients will be selected annually, though the actual number will depend on the quality of the nominees. The recipients of the President's Awards will be announced each November.

- 2. Recognition.** The President's Award recipients will receive recognition for their accomplishments during a ceremony at the White House. In addition, recipients will receive a ceremonial award item and will be recognized on a Government-wide website. The President's Award is non-monetary.