



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET  
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DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
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MEMORANDUM FOR HEADS OF EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

FROM: Beth F. Cobert  
Deputy Director for Management

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Beth F. Cobert", written over the printed name.

SUBJECT: Guidance on Implementing the Federal Customer Service Awards Program

The American people deserve a government that is responsive to their needs. Citizens and businesses expect government services to be well-designed, efficient, and generally comparable to the services they receive from leading private sector organizations. The Federal Government must keep pace with the public's expectations and transform its customer services by regularly soliciting and acting on customer feedback, streamlining processes, and delivering consistent quality across customer service channels.

An important component of delivering service improvements is that front-line staff feel valued in the work they do every day and see their efforts to deliver excellent service recognized and celebrated.

To ensure all Federal agency managers work to identify and support improvements in the services provided to citizens and other customers, the Administration is creating the Federal Customer Service Awards Program. This program is designed to recognize, promote, and reward service excellence, professionalism, and outstanding achievement by Federal employees, including teams working on initiatives with a direct impact on customers. The program will also help identify effective practices that can be replicated within and across agencies.

This awards program is the next step in the Administration's ongoing efforts to improve Federal services, including agency actions taken in response to the April 2011 Executive Order 13571- Streamlining Service Delivery and Improving Customer Service – and government-wide actions in support of the Customer Service Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) Goal. More information on the Customer Service CAP Goal, including the action plan and quarterly updates on progress, are available on [Performance.gov](http://Performance.gov).

The attached guidance provides agencies with answers to key questions regarding the program, as well as associated deadlines. The Workforce and Culture Subgroup of the Customer Service Community of Practice will be working closely with agencies to provide assistance, where necessary, to ensure the successful implementation of this awards program across the Federal Government.

Questions regarding this memorandum can be directed to Mark Bussow (mbussow@omb.eop.gov) in OMB's Office of Performance and Personnel Management.

**Attachment**

**Guidance on Implementing the Federal Customer Service Awards Program**

# Guidance on Implementing the Federal Customer Service Awards Program

## **Section 1: General Information**

### **1.1 What is the purpose of this guidance?**

This guidance is intended to:

- Inform agencies of the structure of the awards program;
- Establish the categories and criteria for the award; and,
- Provide clarity to agencies regarding their role and responsibilities to ensure the success of the program.

### **1.2 To what agencies does this guidance apply?**

This guidance applies to the 15 Federal agencies that provide the majority of direct services to citizens and other customers. These 15 agencies are:

Department of Agriculture  
Department of Commerce  
Department of Education  
Department of Health and Human Services  
Department of Homeland Security  
Department of Housing and Urban Development  
Department of the Interior  
Department of Labor  
Department of State  
Department of the Treasury  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
General Services Administration  
Office of Personnel Management  
Small Business Administration  
Social Security Administration

All other agencies of the Executive Branch are encouraged to adopt award programs similar in purpose and design, and may submit nominations for government-wide awards in exceptional circumstances, in consultation with OMB.

### **1.3 What is the Customer Service Cross Agency Priority (CAP) Goal?**

The Customer Service CAP Goal was established as one of the Administration's Second-Term Management Priorities. The purpose of the CAP Goal is to increase citizen satisfaction and promote positive experiences with the Federal Government by making it faster and easier for individuals and businesses to complete transactions and receive quality services that result in a positive customer experience.

The Customer Service CAP Goal is currently led by two Goal Leaders:

- Lisa Danzig, Associate Director for Personnel and Performance, Office of Management and Budget
- Commissioner, Social Security Administration (Carolyn Colvin, Acting)

Additional information on the CAP Goal is available on [Performance.gov](https://www.performance.gov).

#### **1.4 What is the Customer Service Community of Practice?**

The Customer Service Community of Practice (CoP) is a network of staff across Federal agencies committed to increasing the government’s ability to deliver high quality and timely services in a manner that is responsive to the needs of the people and organizations with whom they interact. The CoP’s objectives include promoting a culture of customer service across the Federal Government, and recognizing excellent customer service practices and interactions to incentivize improvement across all programs. There are three established subgroups of the CoP, Principles and Practices, Workforce and Culture, and Community Governance and Management. The Workforce and Culture subgroup will assist agencies during the implementation of the Customer Service Awards Program.

### **Section 2: The Federal Customer Service Awards Program**

#### **2.1 What is the Federal Customer Service Awards Program?**

The Federal Customer Service Awards Program, formally established by this guidance, will recognize the accomplishments made by Federal employees who deliver exceptional service to their customers. Awards will be provided at two levels:

(1) **[Secretary’s/Administrator’s/Commissioner’s/Director’s] Award for Customer Service (“Agency Award” in this guidance).** A limited number of agency-level awards (approximately 10 but fewer than 50 annually per agency, depending on the size of the agency and scope of interactions with the public) provided by agency leadership, using a process designed by each participating agency consistent with this guidance and agency policies. See Section 3 for details of agency awards.

(2) **President’s Award for Customer Service (“President’s Award” in this guidance).** A government-wide award presented to approximately 10 Agency Award recipients annually. See Section 4 for details of government-wide awards.

The Customer Service Award Program is developed as a part of the fourth strategy, “Focus on the Frontline,” of the Customer Service CAP Goal.

## 2.2 What is the definition of the term “customer”?

A customer is the recipient of a service, experience, information, or product from a Federal agency or on behalf of a federal agency. A customer may be an individual or an organization. In general, when used in this guidance the word “customer” refers to an individual or organization that is not part of the Federal government.

Given the large number of Federal services provided through intermediaries, such as grantees, agencies have discretion to determine when an intermediary should be considered a “customer,” and when the “customer” is the ultimate recipient of services provided by the intermediary. In general, the more direct the governance of the intermediary (for instance with contractors), the more appropriate it will be to consider the ultimate recipient of the services as the “customer,” not the intermediary.

## 2.3 What types of awards will be given?

The Federal Customer Service Awards Program will consist of two types of awards:

- **Individual Award:** Recognizing individuals whose specific accomplishments, professionalism, and commitment to customer service make them a role model for customer service delivery;
- **Initiative Award:** Recognizing initiatives that have directly improved services for customers through the application of technology, improvements in operations, or other innovations.
  - Initiatives must demonstrate a tangible improvement for customers, even if they are indirect in their impact. This may include improvements to services provided to internal agency customers which clearly result in improvements for external customers. General efforts to improve operations or program effectiveness, while valuable, do not qualify for a customer service award unless their ultimate impact on improving customer service can be clearly identified.
  - A limited number of key individual contributors will be identified as the named recipients of an initiative award (in general less than 5), which will also recognize the contributions of a broader team.

## 2.4 What is the process and key deadlines for the awards program?

The awards process will include the following steps:

Deadline	Action	Guidance
April 20, 2015 (first year only)	<b>Agencies develop Agency Award programs.</b> Agencies should develop their own awards processes, and submit an overview of the process to the CAP Goal team. Agencies are encouraged to leverage their existing awards processes to the extent possible, and can begin making awards immediately. To the extent practicable, agencies should provide awards on a rolling basis.	<b>Section 3</b>
July 31	<b>Each agency will nominate two recipients of Agency Awards for the President’s Award.</b> Agency heads should nominate two award recipients for an annual President’s Award. In general, this will include one individual and one initiative award, though the agency has discretion based on the merit of the specific cases.	<b>Section 4</b>
August	<b>Nominations will be considered by a review panel.</b> A panel selected by the Deputy Director of Management, in consultation with the CAP Goal Leaders, will review the nominations and recommend a limited number of President’s Awards.	<b>Section 4</b>
October	<b>Final selections will be announced.</b> The White House will receive the panel recommendations and select and announce the final President’s Award recipients. Approximately 10 recipients will be selected annually, though the actual number will depend on the quality of the nominees.	<b>Section 4</b>

## 2.5 Does the Program include monetary awards?

No. The Federal Customer Service Awards Program will provide recognition, but not monetary awards. The President’s Awards will not include a monetary award. Agencies have discretion within their legal and regulatory policies to offer monetary awards as an enhancement to the Federal program.

### **Section 3: [Secretary's/Administrator's/Commissioner's/Director's] Award for Customer Service ("Agency Awards" in this guidance)**

#### **3.1 What are the agency's responsibilities in support of the Federal Customer Service Awards Program?**

Each agency is responsible for designing their 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. The CoP Workforce and Culture Subgroup will be available to assist agencies as they design their approach.

Agencies must submit a short overview of their awards policy and process to the CAP Goal team by April 20, 2015.

#### **3.2 Who is eligible for the Individual Award?**

All Federal employees in good standing are eligible for the Individual Customer Service 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 this award. In general, agencies should provide awards to individuals who have demonstrated an understanding of customer needs and taken action to address those needs that goes above and beyond existing practices. This could be through a single "heroic" act, or the results of a sustained commitment to innovation and providing excellent customer service.

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.

In general, Individual Award recipients should have direct engagement with the agency's customers or demonstrate a direct beneficial impact on customers as a result of their work.

#### **3.3 Who is eligible for the Initiative Award?**

The Initiative Award will recognize innovations and sustained improvements in customer service that enable agencies to meet the needs of their customers more effectively, leading to increased satisfaction. Initiatives must demonstrate a direct and tangible improvement for the agency's customers, not just improvements in the general level of support provided to agency business units or employees. Examples include:

- Process improvements at customer service center that have directly led to improvements in meeting customer needs.

- The innovative use of online technologies and social media to exceed the expectations of customers.
- The implementation of an agency-wide strategy that has measurably improved the experiences of the agency's customers.

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 less than 5) 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. For example:

- Award presented to: Bob Smith and Shelley Rogers
- With contributions from: The Program Management Office and Office of Innovative Technologies.

### **3.4 What guidelines should agencies follow when designing their application and nominations process?**

Agencies have discretion to design their own nomination and award processes that meet 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. The CoP Workforce and Culture Subgroup will be available to assist agencies as they design their approach. In general, however, those processes should meet the following guidelines:

- Approximately 10 but fewer than 50 Agency Awards shall be presented annually per agency, depending on the size of the agency and scope of interactions with the public, to ensure the selectiveness of the program.
- Agencies should, to the extent practicable, provide opportunities for customers and stakeholders to participate in the nomination and selection process, including providing a means for customers to directly nominate individuals and initiatives for awards. This may also include developing an awards selection committee with customer and stakeholder representation, and representatives from the private sector who provide insight into innovative customer service practices.
- Awards should be submitted, reviewed, and presented on a rolling basis by the agency, 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] Award for Customer Service” and carry the Federal Customer Service Awards Program



branding, in addition to any appropriate agency branding. Logos and branding guidance will be provided.

- The head of the agency should officially select and provide some 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 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, some level of consistency should be provided at the agency level.
- Award recipients should receive a physical award (e.g., plaques, certificates) with program branding.

### **3.5 How should agencies notify the CoP of Award recipients?**

Once an agency presents an Agency Award, the agency should provide the CAP Goal management team a brief overview of the award justification and the accomplishments for which the recipient is being recognized, specifically highlighting the impact on customers. Agencies will be asked to provide appropriate pictures of the recipient and project. Specific details for submitting this information will be available at <https://community.max.gov/x/OJXtKw> by the end of April. This information should be appropriate for posting on the customer service website under development without further review and approval by the agency.

### **3.6 What information should agencies announce to the public regarding Award recipients?**

In addition to the information provided to the CoP for possible posting on the government-wide customer service website, agencies are encouraged to highlight Agency Award recipients through internal agency forums, public events, blog posts, and mentions through official agency social media.

## **Section 4: The President's Award for Customer Service**

### **4.1 How do agencies nominate Agency Award recipients to receive the President's Award?**

Nominations for the President's Award will be considered annually. By July 31<sup>st</sup> of each year, the head of the agency should select two recipients of the Agency Award as nominees for the President's Award. In general, this will include one Individual and one Initiative award, though the agency has discretion based on the merit of the specific cases. Each agency will email their candidates for the President's Award to the Customer Service CAP Goal Management Team.

Specific details for submitting this information will be available at <https://community.max.gov/x/OJXtKw> by the end of April.

#### **4.2 What time period should award nominations cover?**

For the first year of the program, both Agency Awards and nominations for the President's Award may be for activities that occurred over the prior 36 months.

In future years:

- Agency Awards may be for activities that occurred in the prior 12 months, with the exact cutoff dates determined based on the agency process.
- Nominations for the President's Award should come from Agency Awards made in the previous 12 months, or for the previous 12 month period covered by an existing awards program.

#### **4.3 Who will review the nominations for the President's Award?**

The President's award will be administered by OMB's Deputy Director for Management, who will appoint a panel to review the nominations and recommend a limited number of President's Awards. This panel may include officials from the Executive Office of the President and Federal agencies, customer and stakeholder representatives, and experts from the private sector who provide insight into innovative customer service practices. 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.

#### **4.4 What criteria will the panel use to judge awardees?**

The panel will use the general criteria described above for both Individual and Initiative awardees, but will place an emphasis on:

- The number of customers impacted and/or the significance of the services to those customers;
- The awardees' persistence in overcoming obstacles to providing excellent services;
- The utilization of principles and practices of providing excellent customer service;
- The extent to which the individual or initiative exemplifies excellence in public service; and
- Diversity across mission areas and agencies of award recipients.

#### **4.5 How many winners will be chosen?**

Approximately 10 recipients will be selected annually, though the actual number will depend on the quality of the nominees. The number of Individual and Initiative awards will depend on the merit of the nominations.

#### **4.6 What is the timing of the President's Award?**

The recipients of the President's Award will likely be announced near National Customer Service Week, which usually occurs during the first full week of October.

#### **4.7 How will President's Award winners be announced and what will they receive?**

The President's Award recipients will receive recognition from the White House for their accomplishments. In addition, recipients will receive a physical award and will be recognized on a government-wide website dedicated to customer service. The President's Award is non-monetary.