UC Irvine Human Resources
Empower People Success

STAR AWARDS

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **How are the two types of STAR Awards – Achievement and Recognition – the same?**
   Both Achievement and Recognition Awards are intended to recognize and reward individuals, and teams of employees, for demonstrating:

   - **Exceptional performance:** Demonstrated and sustained exceptional performance that consistently exceeds goals and work expectations in quantity and/or quality.
   - **Creativity:** One-time innovation or creation that results in time/dollar savings, revenue enhancement, and productivity improvement; and/or ongoing innovative/creative activities that benefit organizational systems, protocols, and/or procedures.
   - **Organizational abilities:** Exhibiting extraordinary skills in leadership resulting in the accomplishment of significant departmental or divisional goals and objectives; effective project management, which could include developing a project and/or implementing a project with considerable success; and/or demonstrating organizational capability leading to a greater level of effectiveness.
   - **Work success:** Significantly exceeding productivity, customer service, quality of care or similar goals, including demonstrating superior interactions with managers, peers, supervisors, subordinates, the University community, and/or clients and customers served.
   - **Teamwork:** Acting as an exceptionally effective and cooperative team member or team leader or a team that has significantly exceeded the goals/objectives of the department/unit.

2. **How are the Achievement and Recognition Awards different?**
   The threshold for granting an Achievement Award is higher than the threshold for a Recognition Award.

   - Achievement Awards are designed to recognize sustained, exceptional performance and/or significant contributions over an extended period of time that represents a major portion of the employee's area of responsibilities, including performance or project goals above and beyond normal performance expectations.
   - Recognition Awards are designed to recognize notable contributions as they occur, for a specific project or task. Recognition Awards are generally for a special contribution accomplished over a relatively short time period. A Recognition Award lets employees know that their noteworthy contribution was noticed. At the same time, it recognizes and reinforces the behaviors and values that are important at UC Irvine.

3. **How are Achievement and Recognition Awards funded?**
   All Achievement and Recognition awards must be funded by the department that nominated the employee. There is no additional funding available to support the program.

4. **Can Achievement or Recognition Awards be provided to teams?**
   Employees who are part of a team may be considered for the Irvine Campus Achievement and Recognition Award program.

5. **Can a department develop an alternate form of nomination?**
   No, the nomination form must be used without altercation. You may attach an addendum if you need to provide information not contained on the form.

6. **Can staff that will soon be departing UC Irvine be nominated (i.e. retirees)?**
   Any employee who is eligible (based on the published criteria) may be nominated for an Achievement or Recognition Award. However, the employee must be on active pay status or on approved unpaid leave at the time the award payment is processed.

7. **Are student employees (Casual Restricted staff) eligible for this program?**
   Student employees are NOT eligible.

8. **What types of staff employees are eligible for this program?**
   Non-represented and staff employees represented by CX and UAW SV/RP in the following appointment types are eligible: Career, Partial Year Career, Limited, and Contract employees (where eligibility is incorporated into the terms of the contract.)

9. **Can I nominate my supervisor for a STAR award?**
   No, the STAR plan enables managers (who have direct knowledge of an employee's performance evaluation rating) to recognize, acknowledge, and reward employees for exceptional performance, creativity, organizational abilities, work success, teamwork, and/or significant contributions related to and supportive of individual, departmental, divisional, and/or organizational goals and objectives.

10. **All of my employees have made significant performance contributions. Can they all receive STAR awards?**
    No, the STAR plan awards may not be used for past meritorious performance. (See pay-for-performance program.) The awards should recognize significant contributions above and beyond normal performance expectations (Achievement Award) or for special contributions to a specific project or task, or group of projects or tasks (Recognition Award.) In general, no more than 10% of your staff should receive STAR awards - 5% may receive Achievement Awards and another 5% may receive Recognition Awards.

11. **Are there any Award limitations or restrictions?**
    Yes. The following limitations apply to STAR plan cash awards:

    - Employees may receive two Achievement Awards per fiscal year.
    - Employees may receive up to two Recognition Awards per fiscal year with a maximum single award value of $1,000.

- No single STAR plan cash award may exceed 10% of the employee's base pay salary or $10,000, whichever amount is lower. Base pay is the regular rate of pay, excluding overtime, stipends, and differential pay such as shift differential.
- Cumulative STAR Plan cash awards paid to an employee in a Plan year may not exceed 10% of the employee's base salary or $10,000, whichever amount is lower.
- “Across-the-board” type awards (e.g., awards to a category of employees without regard to a recipient's performance or relative contribution) are not allowed under the STAR Plan. Awards must be based on the recipient's achievement as an individual or as part of team.

12. **Can an employee receive an Achievement Award and a Recognition Award at the same time?**
    A STAR award should be given to an employee as soon as possible after the accomplishment or event in order to provide immediate recognition to the employee. Based on the definitions and requirements of the awards it is highly unlikely that an employee would qualify for both awards at the same time.

13. **Is there an exception process to provide an employee with an award greater than $5,000?**
    No exceptions will be made to the maximum award limits.

14. **Is there a recommended pay cycle to process the one-time payment for the Achievement or Recognition Award?**
    No, the Achievement or Recognition Award should be paid to employees as soon as reasonably possible. Providing employees with the award along with a Thank You Letter and an Award Certificate will reinforce the campus’ appreciation for the special achievement.

15. **How is a STAR award taxed?**
    For taxation purposes, STAR award payments are treated as bonus payments and are subject to Federal and State tax withholding and Social Security (OASDI) and/or Medicare taxes if applicable.

16. **Who is responsible for processing a STAR Award?**
    The awards should be processed at the department level by the payroll processor. If the payment is in the current or a future pay period, it can be processed via PayPath Additional Pay. If the payment is retroactive it should be processed via One-Time Pay on the self-service menu. The earn code for the transactions is XSL.

17. **How will the Irvine Campus STAR Award program be monitored?**
    The campus will seek feedback from supervisors, staff, and administrators to ensure the program is achieving outcomes that benefit the campus, departmental operations and individual employees. Central HR will monitor and evaluate the usage of Achievement and Recognition Awards on a regular basis.

18. What is the difference between a Star Award and an Administrative Stipend?

A STAR Award is a one-time bonus to recognize past one-time contributions or short-term project impacts. An Administrative Stipend is additional pay for a defined period to recognize when the co-worker is performing ongoing, but temporary, higher-level or other significant duties, other significant duties not part of the employee's regular position.