

FY 2026-2027
UCI STAFF ACHIEVEMENT AND RECOGNITION AWARD PLAN
GUIDELINES

The UC Office of the President has developed guidelines for a systemwide recognition program, called the Staff Achievement and Recognition (STAR) Plan, to acknowledge and reward exemplary performance and contributions by employees in the UC system. It is governed by [Personnel Policies for Staff Members \(PPSM\) 34](#) and provides guidelines for all University cash recognition awards. Cash award bonuses are discretionary and payments are made in recognition of past performance or contributions. Employee non-cash awards and other gifts, including gift cards and gift certificates, are regulated under [UC Business and Finance Bulletin No. G-41](#).

The STAR Plan enables managers 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.

- 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 substantial 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 for a team that has significantly exceeded the goals/objectives of the department/unit.

I. TYPES OF AWARDS

1. **Achievement Awards** (up to \$10,000): For **sustained, exceptional performance and/or significant contributions** above and beyond normal performance expectations. May be awarded to an individual or team.
2. **Recognition Awards** (up to \$1,000): For **special contributions to a specific project or task**, or group of projects or tasks, accomplished over a relatively short time period. May be awarded to an individual or team.
3. **Excellence in Leadership** (up to \$1,000): For **exceptional leaders** who inspire employees to focus their individual talents on the goals of the organization and contribute at the highest level and are guardians of the culture and exemplars in living the organization's values. (Specific guidelines for Excellence in Leadership Award are attached.)

II. ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility for cash awards under the STAR Plan is outlined below.

- Policy covered, PSS and MSP staff in career, partial-year career, contract (where eligibility is incorporated into the terms of the contract), or limited appointments are eligible for awards under the STAR Plan. Employees in floater appointments may be eligible through an exception granted by the Senior Vice President, UCI Health, and Vice Chancellor, Human Resources, UC Irvine (SVP/VC-HR) and Chancellor or Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor.
- Employees represented by the Teamsters (CX) bargaining unit and the following United Auto Workers (UAW) staff units (1) Student Services and Advising Professionals (SV) or (2) Research and Public Service Professionals (RP) in career, partial-year career, or limited appointments are eligible for awards under the STAR Plan.
- At the time of the award payout, an employee must:
 - Have successfully completed their probationary period, if applicable
 - Be on active status or on an approved leave; and,
 - Received "On Target" or better overall rating on their most recent Align check-in. (For CX and UAW SV/RP employees, this means a performance rating of at least "Meets Expectations" on their last annual performance evaluation.)
- All other exclusively represented employees are not eligible to receive awards under the STAR Plan.
- Senior Management Group (SMG) employees are not eligible for any awards under the STAR Plan.
- Employees participating in an incentive award plan may receive an award under the STAR Plan as long as the incentive plan does not prohibit the receipt of a STAR award or other recognition award.
- The employee's department head is responsible for confirming that the employee is eligible for an award and must approve the employee's award, regardless of the funding source for the award.

III. AWARD LIMITS AND RESTRICTIONS

The following limitations apply to STAR Plan cash awards.

- STAR Awards may be presented at any time during the Plan year and should be awarded as soon as possible after the accomplishments or event in order to provide immediate recognition to employees.
- STAR Awards are non-base building.
- Employees may receive up to two Achievement Awards per fiscal year.
- Employees may receive up to two Recognition Awards per fiscal year.
- Cash awards require supervisory/manager nomination, department head, and VC/Dean approval (see Nomination Form).
- No single STAR Plan cash award may exceed 10% of the employee's base 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.
- STAR Plan awards are strictly discretionary and may not be promised or guaranteed in advance.
- An employee's receipt of an award under the STAR Plan does not establish any right or guarantee that the employee will be eligible for or entitled to an award in any subsequent Plan year.
- "Across-the-board" type awards (e.g., awards to all employees, awards to a category of employees without regard to a recipient's performance or relative contribution, or equal awards to all employees or a majority of employees) are not allowed under the STAR Plan. Awards must be based on the recipient's achievement as an individual or as part of team.
- Under the Excellence in Leadership Award program, managers and supervisors may be nominated every year, but may only receive a STAR cash award every three years (unless manager or supervisor moves to a different job/department).

Exceptions to the above monetary award limits will not be made except in rare circumstances. Any exception will require the approval of the SVP/VC-HR. If the SVP/VC-HR approves, the SVP/VC-HR will need to secure the approval of the Chancellor, the Administrative Oversight Committee (AOC) of the Plan, and the University President. Recommendations for an award that would be an exception to these limits must be submitted in writing to the SVP/VC-HR and include compelling justification for making the exception.

IV. ADMINISTRATION OF AWARDS

- The Earn Code to be used for the STAR Plan awards is **XSL**.

The STAR Plan year will correspond to the University's fiscal year, beginning July 1 and ending the following June 30.

All STAR Plan cash awards for the Plan year should be processed in accordance with year-end closing schedules.

Only local funds will be used for STAR Plan Awards.

STAR Plan cash awards are not considered to be compensation for University benefit purposes, such as the University of California Retirement Plan or employee life insurance programs.

Under Internal Revenue Service Regulations, payment of STAR Plan cash awards must be included in the employee's income as wages subject to withholding for federal and state income taxes and applicable FICA taxes. Payment is reportable on the employee's Form W-2 in the year paid.

V. RECORDKEEPING AND COMPLIANCE

Documentation of an Achievement or Recognition Award should be placed in the employee's file. Future assessment of UC Irvine's Staff Achievement and Recognition (STAR) Award Plan may require a review of these forms. Central Human Resources will run a report on a quarterly basis to monitor and review use of Achievement and Recognition Awards by Control Point. Achievement and Recognition Award payments will be reviewed to ensure campus areas are making use of this program and those groups that have not provided Achievement and Spot Awards will be encouraged to do so.

The STAR Plan may be terminated or replaced at any time for any reason by the President. The Chancellor may suspend or terminate this location's implementation of the STAR Plan at any time.

VI. PLAN CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

Questions regarding the STAR Plan should be directed to the Employee Experience Center at eec@uci.edu or (949) 824-0500.