

Guidelines for Writing Award Justifications

When preparing written justifications for awards, recommending and approving officials must ensure that the NRCS employee's contributions support the criteria for the award selected. The justification should be concise and specific, citing specific examples of the employee's performance and accomplishments.

The written justification statement should begin with a clear, direct, and specific description of reasons the employee deserves recognition. The description must describe the challenges the employee faced, the actions taken by the employee, and the results the employee achieved. The most critical and important information regarding the employee's accomplishments should be presented in the first few sentences of the written justification, with specific examples that address the award criteria and why the employee's accomplishments are worthy of the award. These examples should include a description of the outcomes, results, or activities the employee accomplished "above and beyond" his or her job description. The written justification should state the qualities that make the employee worthy of recognition and that are clearly relevant to the award criteria, such as the contribution, teambuilding, collaboration, initiative, and leadership exhibited by the employee.

Award justifications for rating-based awards do not require a separate award justification provided the justification for the rating of record is thoroughly documented during the appraisal process.

Award justifications should focus on the employee's contributions and the significance of the employee's actions and how those actions have exceeded what is expected of the employee. The cited actions, their impact, and significance are important and should be clearly stated.

Awards justifications must—

- Be objective and cover the employee's job performance rather than personal traits. Explain what the employee accomplished to warrant recognition.
- Emphasize results achieved, which are beyond established performance standards, describe how accomplishments exceed normal expectations, and clearly describe results or outcomes of the accomplishments.
- Identify the time period covered by the accomplishment.
- Clearly describe results or outcomes of the accomplishments.
- Contain statements regarding how the actions helped achieve tangible or intangible benefits to USDA or NRCS at the national, State, area, and/or field office level.
- Describe the extent to which unusual ability has been exercised in solving difficult problems.
- Describe the extent to which competence and resourcefulness contributed to organizational effectiveness and efficiency.
- Describe the extent to which the employee's accomplishments led to improvement of methods, procedures, or equipment that have resulted in substantial benefits for the organization.
- Avoid writing vague descriptors and sweeping generalities when describing accomplishments.
- Avoid statements that describe your personal beliefs or philosophies. Focus on specific challenges and results achieved by the employee or group.

The recommending official must include examples demonstrating how the employee was personally responsible for the achievement or accomplishment, or his or her portion, if the award is part of a group award. The justification also must address that the dollar amount of the award is commensurate with the value of the contribution to NRCS, based on clear tangible and/or intangible benefits to the agency. Tangible and intangible benefits may include actual dollar savings to NRCS, costs that have been precluded as a result of the employee's contribution, or whether the employee's contribution extends beyond NRCS to USDA in its entirety.