



WELCOME to the
**DEFENSE
ACQUISITION**

Awards

— 2024 —



EXCEPTIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Programs like the Defense Acquisition Awards are designed to honor exceptional contributions. (Photo by Michael Bubbar-Krukowski and Nicole Brate, Visual Arts and Press, Defense Acquisition University)

THE IMPORTANCE OF RECOGNITION

Three ways to drive engagement in acquisition award nominations.

by Rachel M. Longarzo

Recognizing employee achievements through awards is a powerful way to boost morale and strengthen the Army Acquisition Workforce (AAW) culture. In addition to G-1 Human Resources Command awards programs at your organization and command level, there are several HQDA and DOD awards programs that recognize AAW members. Programs like the Defense Acquisition Awards, the Army Acquisition Hall of Fame and the Army Acquisition Executive Awards are designed to honor exceptional contributions, but all too often these initiatives fall flat—not because they lack significance but because employees view the process as a burden rather than an opportunity.

So how can you motivate your organization to truly engage in the process with so many competing priorities? The good news is that building engagement doesn't require a massive overhaul. With the right strategies, you can inspire employees to nominate their colleagues, celebrate achievements and take pride in the process. There are three key ways to drive AAW engagement for better, more inspired nominations: Creating excitement around the nominations, encouraging participation in the awards and sustaining year-round employee engagement with awards.

CREATE EXCITEMENT AROUND NOMINATIONS

People are naturally inspired by examples, so sharing success stories can be a powerful way to generate enthusiasm. Highlight past award winners and how their achievements made an impact. Share stories that resonate, such as how the nominee went above and beyond or contributed in meaningful ways. This can be done through email spotlights or quick shoutouts during team meetings. When employees see the real-world value of these awards, it shifts the narrative. It's no longer just about filling out a nomination form—it's about recognizing and celebrating an individual's hard work and contribution to the mission. For example, inductees into the Army Acquisition Hall of Fame are celebrated for their lifelong contributions to advancing the mission, often serving as role models for the next generation of acquisition professionals.

To build awareness and excitement, promote the awards widely and creatively. Leverage multiple channels: newsletters, emails, team meetings or senior leadership summits. The goal is to socialize the importance of awards well in advance of deadlines. Use plain, relatable language in your messaging. Avoid overwhelming people with rules right away. Instead, focus on why nominations matter and how easy it is to participate by sharing quick links and top-line information on how to apply.

The Program Executive Office for Missiles and Space (PEO MS) came up with a great way to organize all of their award programs. Mark Farthing, an instructional systems specialist at PEO MS, suggests creating a spreadsheet that includes all of the upcoming award programs, their deadlines, points of contact, eligibility criteria and where to submit. Farthing sends this out to PEO MS's Organizational Acquisition Point of Contact (OAP) and senior leadership to distribute and ensure that everyone is aware of what's upcoming. "Pre-planning for the year is key. The awards spreadsheet ensures visibility across the organization and allows for people to plan accordingly to meet all awards deadlines," said Farthing.

When leaders champion the program, they signal its importance. Ask managers and executives to actively encourage their teams to submit nominations. Even better, have them share personal stories of why recognition matters to them. "Our acquisition awards represent the pinnacle of acquisition excellence. The AAW is comprised of professional, agile and innovative experts who deserve to be recognized. An award shines a spotlight on your achievements, helping to build your professional credibility and opening new doors for growth and opportunity in your career," said Ronald R. Richardson Jr., director, U.S.



ADVANCING THE MISSION

The 2024 Army Acquisition Hall of Fame inductees were celebrated for their lifelong contributions to advancing the mission and serving as role models for the next generation of acquisition professionals. The awardees, from left, are Maureen Cross, Cathy Dickens, Gary Winkler and Joseph Yakovac. (Photo by Rachel Longarzo, USAASC)

Army Acquisition Support Center. "Our acquisition leaders could not do what is needed without the support of their workforce. I encourage those leaders across the Army acquisition enterprise to make time to write an endorsement letter, support your organization's awards POCs [points of contact] and submit nominations. Ultimately, awards strengthen morale, foster a positive work environment and help showcase to our Nation our workforce's values and commitment to excellence."

ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION

Taylor Ebner and Angela Hayden, both OAPs for Joint Program Executive Office for Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defense (JPEO-CBRND), shared some best practices they use to get people involved and streamline the process for submitting nominations.

First, send out an "Intent to Nominate" email to your contacts. This lets the awards program managers know who you're intending to nominate and includes a short description and information on the award you are nominating for. This step helps avoid duplicate nominations and ensures you're casting a wide net and nominating for the various categories, Ebner explained. Then, senior leadership can review and fill in any gaps, ensuring maximum coverage and participation across their organization for each award category. From there, the nominator will be notified to draft their nomination packet, working closely with the awards program managers to edit and finalize the packet for endorsement.

A well-run awards program benefits from strong oversight. Establishing an award committee ensures the process is fair, transparent and inclusive. "The committee can be made up of individuals from

various departments or teams, offering a cross-functional perspective on the nominations,” Ebner said. The committee’s role isn’t just to vet applications; it’s also to serve as ambassadors for the program. Committee members can promote the awards, answer questions and provide guidance on what makes a strong nomination. To keep the program fresh and prevent bias, rotate committee members periodically. Bringing in new voices ensures that the process continues to evolve and reflects the diverse values and priorities of your organization.

Also, don’t forget to utilize your Army acquisition career management advocate, who assists with career planning and advocates for the interests of civilian employees, ensuring their professional development and career advancement within the Army, or your OAP, who provides organizational-level support and advice to ensure the workforce is qualified, professional and capable. Both resources can provide guidance on who to nominate.

To build excitement around award programs, it’s important to make the nomination process feel approachable and rewarding. Encouraging participation is about removing barriers, creating a sense of collaboration and recognizing the effort it takes to celebrate others. There are ways to make it easier and more engaging for employees to get involved.

Writing nominations can feel daunting. Providing easy-to-use templates and clear examples can make all the difference. Consider hosting quick drop-in sessions or workshops to help employees craft stronger nominations. These don’t need to be overly formal—a 15-minute walkthrough on “how to write a compelling nomination” can empower even the most hesitant participants.

Nominations don’t have to be a solo effort. Encourage teams to come together to highlight a colleague’s achievements. Collaborative nominations can not only result in better submissions, but they also build camaraderie and reinforce team bonds. For example, a team could collectively write about how a colleague contributed to a shared project, with each member offering specific details. The result is richer, more thoughtful and captures multiple perspectives.

SUSTAIN ENGAGEMENT YEAR-ROUND

Recognition shouldn’t be limited to an award season. Share success stories consistently throughout the year to keep the excitement alive. Monthly spotlights or newsletters featuring standout employees, such as Faces of the Force, can maintain momentum and set the stage for award nominations when the time comes.

The JPEO-CBRND celebrates its award winners by drafting an email that goes out to the workforce and highlighting their successes in a social media campaign. Hayden explained that “these smaller, ongoing moments of recognition remind employees that their contributions are valued and keep the idea of celebrating achievements top of mind.”

After each award cycle, ask for feedback to determine what worked and what didn’t—and whether or not there were barriers to participation. This input is invaluable for improving future programs. For example, if employees mention that the nomination process felt time-consuming, look for additional ways to streamline the submission process. When people see their feedback being implemented, they’re more likely to stay engaged.

Connect the awards program to your organization’s bigger picture. If you’re focused on innovation, highlight how nominations celebrate creative problem-solving. If teamwork is a priority, emphasize recognizing those who go above and beyond for the group. When employees see the alignment between recognition and organizational goals, it gives the awards greater meaning and motivates participation.

CONCLUSION

Driving excitement and participation in award nominations isn’t about reinventing the wheel—it’s about creating a culture where recognition feels natural, accessible and meaningful. By sharing success stories, simplifying the nomination process and celebrating achievements year-round, organizations can inspire employees to take part in recognizing their peers.

When done right, the impact of awards goes far beyond the awards themselves. It builds stronger teams, boosts morale and creates an environment where everyone feels valued for the work they do. So, start spreading the word—who will you nominate today?

For more information about awards best practices and to find the 2025 Army Acquisition Award call for nominations openings, go to <https://asc.army.mil/web/acquisition-awards/>.

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