TOP CAT 2008-2009
Staff Recognition and Development Program

TOP CAT Program Guidelines

These guidelines provide a general framework for campus implementation of cash awards for policy-covered, non-represented employees under the Office of the President's 2008-2009 Guidelines for Staff Recognition and Development Programs for Policy Covered Staff. At the University of California Merced this award program has been named the Top Cat Employee Recognition Program and with a cash award being called a Top Cat Award.

This is an annual program in which the assessment and the available funds vary from fiscal year to fiscal year. Updated instructions will be provided annually based upon instructions the campus receives from the Office of the President and the payroll assessment amount.

The purpose of the program is to

- Recognize employees for their individual accomplishments and outcomes as well as for consistently maintaining a level of exemplary performance
- Provide an immediate form of recognition to employees for successful completion of a project, going "above and beyond," and increased efficiency
- Support career development through professional development awards

Eligibility

All regular status (non-probationary), non-represented, career employees with a satisfactory or better performance are eligible. Awards can be given to individuals or teams.

The following employees are **not** eligible for participation in the Top Cat Award Program:

- Employees in Senior Management Group
- Employees in contract, per diem and/or floater appointments
- Employees in bargaining units
- Employees in contract appointments are not eligible for awards through this assessment plan. However, they may be eligible for school/department award funding if their eligibility has been incorporated into the provisions of their contract.

Note: Employees whose annual base salary is at or exceeds $100,000 are not eligible for cash awards. Employees whose annual base salary is at or exceeds $100,000 may be eligible for professional development awards in the form of tuition reimbursements, direct payment to the vendor, or other costs associated with professional development. This includes courses, workshops, seminars, conferences, or any other professional/education option that would increase the recipient's employment and promotional opportunities.

Selection Criteria

Awards may be given to employees/teams who contributed to the department/organizational unit, school, and/or campus.

Examples of accomplishments that could be eligible for awards include, but are not limited to:

- Outstanding one-time accomplishment
- Development or implementation of an idea that results in significant savings, strategic sourcing
- Completion of a significant project or program
- Attainment of departmental goals
- Improved department/unit performance or enhanced operations
- Increased customer/client satisfaction
- Sustained Excellent Performance
- Sustained outstanding team performance

The process established by each organizational unit should ensure consistency in the application of the selection criteria and in the distribution of the award type and amount.

Award Fund

An annual payroll assessment is made by the Office of the President Business and Financial Services department to provide funding for the Top Cat Program. This award funding for the Staff Recognition Program is provided by an assessment of payroll for all staff titles, excluding Senior Management Program, contract, floater, per diem and bargaining unit employees.

Notification of the total amount of the available funds for the campus will come from the Business and Financial Services department. . The Business and Financial Services department will notify each Vice Chancellor of their eligible employees and fund source amounts. General funds may not be used for non-general fund positions. The Business and Financial Services department can advise regarding procedures to verify appropriate usage by funds sources.

Amount of Awards

All cash awards are subject to appropriate tax deductions and are non-base building.

There is no cap on the number of cash awards an employee may receive; however, combined individual and team awards may not exceed $1,000 per year for an individual. Professional development awards may not exceed $3,500 per year for an individual.

Types of Awards

Within the guidelines established by the appropriate Vice Chancellor, the following are indicative of, but not limited to, the types of awards available:

- Cash awards to recognize outstanding individual and/or team accomplishments;

- Funding for courses and workshops leading to a degree, certification, or license undertaken to develop needed skills and knowledge that may lead to promotional opportunities;
- Professional seminars and conferences;
- Any other professional/educational option that would increase the recipient's employment and promotional opportunities.

Nomination Process

Schools/Departments must first ensure that nominees are eligible for consideration in accordance With the eligibility requirements described in the eligibility section above.

Individual Award Nomination

- The Top Cat Employee Nomination Form must be completed in order for an employee to be considered for the award.
- The nomination must be approved by the supervisor, Department Head or Dean prior to submission to the Vice Chancellor or Provost for approval

Team Award Nominations

- Team Achievement Award goals may be established annually. They should be formally written and communicated to the affected work group, with the award being dependent upon the achievement of the specific predetermined criteria, or the team may receive an award for past performance.
- The Top Cat Employee Nomination Form must be completed in order for a team to be considered for the award.
- The nomination must be approved by the supervisor, Department Head or Dean prior to submission to the Vice Chancellor or Provost for approval.

Professional Development Awards:

- The Top Cat Employee Nomination Form for Professional Development must be used to nominate an employee for a professional development award.
- Development Awards may not be used to pay for management required training.
- The nomination must be approved by the supervisor, Department Head or Dean prior to submission to the Vice Chancellor or Provost for approval.

Implementation Process

- Human Resources will announce the program to the campus and make the nominating forms available.
- The Business and Financial Services department will determine and notify the campus of the amount of funds available.
- The Business and Financial Services department will determine and provide a list to the Vice Chancellors and to Human resources of the funding sources by department/school and employee.
- Vice Chancellors will notify departments/schools of funding sources and dollar amount of funds available.
- Department/School will determine eligibility based upon guidelines provided.

- Managers/supervisors will fill out the nominating form and submit the form to the department Head/Dean for approval.
- Nominations approved by the department head/ Dean will be forwarded to the Vice Chancellor for approval**.**
- If more than one employee is nominated in the same school/department/nominations must be prioritized on the nomination form.
- Nominations approved by the Vice Chancellor will be added to the Top Cat Report template.
- The Vice Chancellor or Dean will notify the individual employee of the award amount and type in writing.
- Business and Financial Services will implement the award funding through the EDB processor.
- Nominations for Student Employees should be sent to Career Services for final approval.

Deadline
The program operates on a fiscal year basis. The Office of the President requires that all program funds for 2008-2009 fiscal year must be committed by June 1, 2009.

Reporting
The Office of the President requires that each campus Human Resources department report on the distribution of awards and funds including information on local supplementation of the program; therefore, distribution of all recognition awards, regardless of funding source, must be reported to the Compensation and Classification Unit of Human Resources by June 1, 2009.

Please use the required TOP CAT Award Reporting Form to report submission requirements.

TOP CAT: Forms and Resources

TOP CAT Guidelines
TOP CAT Nomination Form
TOP CAT Professional Development Nomination Form
TOP CAT Award Reporting Form
TOP CAT FAQ

Need an expert? Questions regarding the Employee Recognition Program should be directed to comp@ucmerced.edu

Notice: University policies, procedures and applicable collective bargaining agreements shall supersede information in this document or elsewhere on this site.