

U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary's Awards – Categories

Secretary's Exceptional Service Gold Medal Award

This is the highest award for service granted by the Secretary. The award honors exceptional leadership or service distinguished by achievements of unique national or international significance, reflecting great credit on the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) by markedly improving the security of our homeland. The Secretary may present the award to an individual or a group. *Typically, the Department will grant only one award in this category annually.*

Secretary's Award for Leadership Excellence

This award recognizes an individual and a team that exemplifies the Department of Homeland Security's leadership philosophy, principles, and core values of integrity, vigilance, and respect. Puts employees first, and inspires and motivates others. *This award is named for the first Secretary of the Department, Tom Ridge, who embodied these qualities.*

Secretary's Meritorious Service Silver Medal Award

This award is the second highest award presented by the Secretary and recognizes outstanding leadership, superior public service, or unusually significant contributions to strengthening homeland security. It may recognize a body of work regarding remarkable innovation or notable resourcefulness and diligence that improved the effectiveness of one or more DHS missions. *The Department will present no more than fifteen awards in this category annually.*

Secretary's Award for Valor

This award is the highest recognition for extraordinary acts of valor occurring either on or off duty. The employee will have demonstrated selfless response by performing courageously in a highly dangerous or life-threatening situation to protect another's life or to save significant assets or infrastructure from harm. Both civilian and military employees of the Department are eligible for this award. *Typically, the Department will award only one award in this category annually.*

Secretary's Award for Exemplary Service

This award recognizes exemplary individual service by DHS employees serving in administrative, technical, clerical, and general support positions. Employees in support services positions below GS-11 and WG-8 are eligible for this award. *The Department will present no more than fifteen of these awards annually.*

Secretary's Award for Excellence

This award recognizes individuals or teams that employ a strategic and enterprise-wide approach to strengthening the DHS mission and its operations. The nominees should exhibit an ongoing record of high standards of achievement and innovation. The work of the nominee(s) may have resulted in superior performance and/or significant operational improvements in the manner in which capabilities are developed and deployed. The nominee's achievement/contributions should include maximizing the effectiveness of people, processes, and technologies; providing wise stewardship of resources; and enhancing the capabilities of Component/DHS employees. *Typically, the Department presents twenty to twenty-five awards in this category annually.*

Secretary’s Unity of Effort Team Award

This award recognizes outstanding team achievements by employees within and across the Department, as well as, with interagency partners, working collectively to advance the mission of the DHS in securing the Nation. The work of the team will have resulted in superior performance, significant operational improvements, or notable innovation in support of DHS missions.

Secretary’s Unit Award

This award recognizes any unit within the Department (such as a Component, directorate, office, division, or section) with outstanding team achievements in operational areas such as law enforcement, aviation, cybersecurity, border patrol, hiring, acquisition, and information technology. The work will have resulted in measurable improvements in training and development, and will have demonstrated an investment in the workforce to make it more capable. The work of the unit will include superior performance and significant operational improvements and/or notable innovation in support of DHS missions. The results will include an overall improvement in workforce morale. *The Department does not expect to distribute more than fifteen of these awards annually.*

Secretary’s Award for Outstanding Achievement in Diversity Management

This award recognizes an employee who has excelled in efforts to promote diversity at DHS through outstanding leadership and innovation. It may acknowledge individual efforts exclusively within DHS or with external partners who assist DHS in meeting our commitment to diversity. *Typically, the Department will only present one award in this category annually.*

Secretary’s Award for Volunteer Service

This award recognizes significant contributions by DHS employees who serve as volunteers with non-profit or community service programs or activities. The employee’s contributions should be direct, sustained, and have meaningful results for individuals or larger public good. *Typically, the Department will only grant one award in this category annually.*