

NOAA Corps Awards Guidance (aka How To: Awards)

1. Purpose

- To make the awards process as transparent as possible for supervisors, nominators, awardees, and OMAO/NOAA Corps officers as a whole. In particular, this document will focus on the awards process for the Uniform and Awards Board and CPC.

2. References

- [NOAA Corps Directives](#) - Chapter 10, Part 1, Section 10010 - Uniform and Awards Board
- [NOAA Corps Directives](#) - Chapter 12, Part 6 - Insignia, Medal and Ribbon Bars
- [NOAA Corps Directives](#) - Chapter 12, Part 7 - Awards
- OMAO Document Management System - 2000, Training and Certification
- [NOAA Form 56-63](#): NOAA Commissioned Officer Corps Recommendation for Award

3. Eligible awards

Eligible awards for NOAA Corps officers may be routed through the Uniform and Awards Board, Department of Commerce (DOC), NOAA / Line Offices, CPC, and other means. Submission processes and award precedence are detailed in [NOAA Corps Directives](#), Chapter 12, Part 7.

Uniform and Awards Board	DOC	NOAA / Line Office	Commissioned Personnel Center	Other
Meritorious Service Medal (NCMS)	Gold (GOLD)	Administrators Award (NAAM)	USCG Arctic Service Medal (ARCT)	ACO Junior Officer of the Year (ACOJ)
Commendation Medal (NCCM)	Silver (SILV)	Unit Citation (NUCA)	Recruiting Achievement Ribbon (NCRA)	ACO Science (ACOS)
Achievement Medal (NCAM)	Bronze (BRON)		Special Duty Ribbon (NSDR)	ACO Engineering (ACOE)
Director's Ribbon (NCDR)			Sea Service Deployment Ribbon (N SSR)	SAME Colbert (COLB)
Meritorious Team Commendation Ribbon (NCMT)			Atlantic Service Ribbon (NCAS)	SAME Karo (KARO)
National Response Deployment Medal (NRDM)			Pacific Service Ribbon (NCPS)	NSF Antarctica Service Medal (AASM)
Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal (NCOV)			Mobile Duty Service Ribbon (MCMD)	
			International Service Ribbon (NCIS)	
	National Response Service Ribbon (NRSR)			

3. Uniform and Awards Board (UAB) background

- The UAB is a volunteer group of 10-15 NOAA Corps officers that serve an 18 month term and meet on a monthly basis. Mariners and aviators of all ranks are represented.
- Each month, the UAB convenes virtually to review award submissions and make recommendations to the Director, NOAA Corps.

4. Nomination process for UAB awards





- A. Draft award
 - a. Nominator drafts award on [NOAA Form 56-63](#), filling out sections 1-5. The recommender is usually the officer's supervisor, but anyone can nominate an officer for an award.
 - b. The narrative should not exceed the available space in NOAA Form 56-63. Lists of names for team awards are allowed as attachments to the nomination form.
- B. Route award
 - a. Forward the award to the appropriate chain of command for additional endorsements (NOAA Form 56-63; Sections 6-7).
 - b. Required: Primary Intermediate Authority is usually the next-level supervisor or other senior official.
 - c. Optional: Secondary Intermediate Authority is strongly encouraged for high level awards. Include Line Office Liaison officer if no other NOAA Corps officer is included on the submission change.
 - d. There should be at least one senior NOAA Corps officer among the signatories.
- C. Submit to the UAB
 - a. Awards shall be submitted to noaacorps.uab@noaa.gov.
 - b. For review by the next month's UAB, nominations are due no later than the last business day of the previous month.
- D. UAB review
 - a. UAB members recommend, by majority vote, to Approve, Upgrade, Downgrade, or Rewrite. If the result is anything other than "Approve," the UAB Chair(s) will follow up with the nominator.
 - b. Nominators will be given one opportunity to rewrite the award nomination before the UAB moves forward with a recommendation to downgrade the award.
 - c. The UAB Chair(s), serving as UAB Authority, completes NOAA Form 56-63, Section 8.
- E. NOAA Corps Director approval
 - a. Recommendations from the UAB are forwarded to the Director, NOAA Corps for review and approval (NOAA Form 56-63; Section 9).
- F. Present to officer
 - a. UAB Chair(s) debrief the Director, NOAA Corps on the proceedings and recommendations.
 - b. UAB notifies the nominator of award status.
 - c. Within 6-8 weeks, CPC prepares and mails certificates, ribbons, and/or medals, and uploads the award to the awardee's OPF.
 - d. Nominators may choose to notify the officer of their award immediately upon notification, or wait until they receive the certificate.




5. Recommendations for successful UAB award submissions

- Timeline:
 - Nominations should be submitted after the period of performance.
 - Alternatively, for end of tour awards, nominations may be made within two months before an officer's rotation date.
 - If a nomination is not made within 120 days, a letter of lateness, addressed to the Director, NOAA Corps, must accompany the nomination. A sample letter of lateness is included on the [CPC Website](#).
- Reason for award:
 - Achievement - Used for specific achievements/tasks that merit an award. Usually spans a short time period.
 - Service - Used for sustained performance that goes above and beyond typical duties. Usually spans a longer time period.
- Justification and citation data:
 - Commonly approved awards have specific language on the task(s) achieved, challenges faced, the resulting tangible impacts, metrics, a rationale for how the officer went above and beyond his or her typical duties, and adequately reflect the criteria listed for each award (see Section 6).
 - The justification should include several achievements that support the proposed award criteria ([Chapter 12, Part 7](#)).
 - Minimize unsubstantiated results or flowery rhetoric.
 - Use caution including acronyms and assumed familiarity with "normal" operations, as the UAB consists of officers across disciplines.
 - The proposed citation should succinctly summarize the achievements listed in no more than two sentences.
- Endorsements:
 - Two endorsements are recommended (see note 4B, above).
 - Additional commentary is not necessary, but may strengthen the nomination.
- Other information:
 - Group awards - Only one nomination using NOAA Form 56-63 is required to nominate a team for NOAA Corps Meritorious Team Commendation Ribbon (NCMT). Ensure the names of all members are captured in the nomination form or in an attachment.
 - If an achievement does not meet the criteria for an award, consider submitting a Letter of Appreciation directly to CPC for the officer's OPF.

6. NOAA Corps award criteria




The following list is a summary of awards evaluated by the UAB. Detailed award criteria can be found in the [NOAA Corps Directives](#), Section 7.





<i>Award</i>	<i>Criteria</i>
NOAA Corps Meritorious Service Medal (NCMS) 	Highest honorary award of NOAA Corps, reflecting outstanding meritorious achievement/service to the United States in a position of considerable responsibility. This may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary acts of heroism (not warranting a Gold or Silver Medal) • Meritorious service worthy of special recognition, far superior officers in grade, demonstrating significant leadership accomplishments, or significant/substantial contributions to the government. May cover an extended period of time • Outstanding career service worth of special recognition, in view of an officer's sustained performance over multiple assignments
NOAA Corps Commendation Medal (NCCM) 	Awarded for heroic or meritorious acts (preservation of life/property) or service, which may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acts of heroism (not warranting a Gold or Silver Medal) • Outstanding achievement with a definite contribution to the government, such as invention or an improvement in design, procedure, or organization • Meritorious service superior to that usually expected of an individual commensurate with his/her grade • Leadership sustained so as to demonstrate a high state of development; be of such merit as to earn singular recognition; and reflect most creditably on the efforts of the individual towards accomplishment of the unit mission
NOAA Corps Achievement Medal (NCAM) 	Awarded for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustained performance for professional and/or leadership achievements, or • Specific superior achievement resulting in benefits or savings to the government
NOAA Corps Director's Ribbon (NCDR) 	Awarded for noteworthy accomplishments in the performance of duties (to a lesser extent of an NCAM), which may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unusual/substantial accomplishment set apart from others in similar circumstances • Sustained exemplary performance set apart from others in similar circumstances

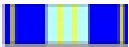

<p>NOAA Corps Meritorious Team Commendation Ribbon (NCMT)</p> 	<p>Awarded to a group of individuals who, because of their individual and collective efforts, have made substantive contributions to NOAA's programs as supported or executed by OMAO or which include NOAA Corps Officers or OMAO staff members. Teams or groups shall not be recognizable standard NOAA units such as ships or offices, but rather small teams with specific tasking working within larger NOAA units. Consideration is given, but not limited to those contributions which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are outstanding enough to bring unusual credit and/or favorable attention to NOAA and the Department of Commerce • Result in greatly advancing or furthering NOAA programs • Accomplish significant savings or improvements in NOAA's operating programs • Represent outstanding service to the public
<p>NOAA Corps National Response Deployment Medal (NCDM)</p> 	<p>Awarded for significant participation in any national response operations, which may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any NOAA Corps officers assigned to NOAA ship/aircraft deployed on specific tasking of response activities • Any NOAA Corps officer deployed to the response effort with specific duties related to the incident • Any personnel of another uniformed service assigned to assist NOAA in the execution of response operations
<p>NOAA Corps Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal (NCOV)</p> 	<p>Awarded for performing outstanding volunteer community service of a sustained, direct, and consequential nature. The service must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be to the civilian community, to include the uniformed services family community • Be significant in nature and produce tangible results • Reflect favorably on the NOAA Corps/DOC • Be of a sustained and direct nature

7. CPC awards

The following awards are *commonly* sent to CPC for distribution. This is not a complete list. Additional details may be found in the [NOAA Corps Directives](#), Chapter 12, Part 7.

<i>Award</i>	<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Nomination Process</i>
<p>Antarctica Service Medal (AASM)</p> 	<p>Awarded for 30 days of service south of latitude 60°S at sea, on land, or in the air under competent orders.</p>	<p>Upon completion of the eligibility requirements, National Science Foundation (NSF) will contact the eligible officer for the award. If no contact, the commanding officer or officer in charge shall forward to the NSF, Officer of Polar Programs, an appropriate documentation, in letter form, listing the names of the participant, their social security numbers, and inclusive dates of qualification.</p> <p>AASM inquiries: antarcticaservicemedals@usap.gov</p>
<p>USCG Arctic Service Medal (ARCT)</p> 	<p>Awarded to officers who serve on a ship, land, or flight assignment for at least 21 non-consecutive days in the Arctic *(further details to the right and in NCD Ch12).</p>	<p>Upon completion of an eligible deployment, a memorandum with inclusive dates shall be forwarded to the Director, CPC for routing to the Director, NOAA Corps for approval. Authorized orders should also be included to verify time requirements.</p> <p>*For vessels: north of the Arctic Circle (May1-Oct31) or north of latitude 60 degrees North (Nov1-Apr30) For aircraft or shore deployments: north of Arctic Circle (year-round)</p>
<p>NOAA Unit Citation (NUCA)</p> 	<p>Awarded to a group of employees who have made substantive contributions to NOAA's programs.</p>	<p>Submit via CD-326 to the Line Office Assistant Administrator, NOAA Staff/Program Office Director, or appropriate delegated authority. Additional details in the NAO 202-451: NOAA Incentive Awards Program Handbook. Section 07.04. For OMAO Unit Citations, the nominations should be routed to the OMAO Chief of Staff.</p>

<p>NOAA Corps Recruiting Achievement Ribbon (NCRA)</p> 	<p>Awarded to officers that complete eight distinct events (recruiting, outreach, or interviews) in a 365 consecutive day period.</p>	<p>Upon completion of the eligibility requirements, the recruiting office may authorize and issue this award, and shall forward to the Director, CPC appropriate documentation listing the inclusive dates for which this ribbon has been authorized.</p>
<p>NOAA Corps Sea Service Deployment Ribbon (NSSR)</p> 	<p>Awarded to officers who accumulate a 90 consecutive-day deployment within a 12 month period of sea duty.</p>	<p>Submit via the Service Authorization Worksheet on the CPC website. Document should be signed by the Commanding Officer and routed to CPC.</p>
<p>Service Ribbons - Atlantic (NCAS) Pacific (NCPS)</p> 	<p>Awarded for 180 days of permanent sea duty, 180 total days of flight ops (NCAS) or 30 total days of flight ops (NCPS) while in permanent aviation duty, in each respective ocean.</p>	<p>Submit via the Service Authorization Worksheet on the CPC website. Document should be signed by the Commanding Officer and routed to CPC.</p>
<p>NOAA Corps Mobile Duty Service Ribbon (NCMD)</p> 	<p>Awarded to officers who complete 180 days of a mobile duty assignment.</p>	<p>Submit a memo to CPC demonstrating how the eligibility requirements were met. Most assignments have clear Mobile Duty Assignment designations in their billet descriptions, but others may have additional authorization to qualify, such as NOAA Corps aviators.</p>

<p>NOAA Corps International Service Ribbon (NCIS)</p> 	<p>Awarded to officers operating in international waters, airspace, or on land. Refer to NCD Ch12 for details on eligibility.</p>	<p>Submit via the Service Authorization Worksheet on the CPC website. Document should be signed by the Commanding Officer and routed to CPC.</p>
<p>NOAA Corps Special Duty Ribbon (NSDR)</p> 	<p>Awarded to officers for completing a special duty assignment as designated by the Directives (i.e. Assignment Branch, NCOTC, training officer or professor at a service academy, instructor pilot designation) or as identified by Line Office Liaisons.</p>	<p>Upon completion of the eligibility requirements, the supervisor of the officer shall forward to the Director, CPC, a memorandum demonstrating how the eligibility requirements were met listing the inclusive dates for which this ribbon has been authorized.</p>

For assistance with CPC-managed awards, please consult the [Officer Personnel Management Division \(OPMD\) Points of Contact](#).

8. Nomination Examples

The following award examples were created by the UAB to help provide context for what makes a strong write-up. These awards are generic, although may be based on real events.

NOAA Corps Meritorious Service Medal (NCMS)

- Context: As Commanding Officer of NOAA Ship Y, CDR X led a 12-month circumnavigation of the globe with 13 foreign port calls and 2 visits above the Arctic Circle, supported all NOAA lines offices alongside other notable support for the Canadian Coast Guard and DOD partners with no lost days at sea.
- Justification:
 - Ship Improvements - CDR X championed multiple upgrades to NOAA Ship Y, including \$1M upgrades to the ship's multi-beam sonar that enhanced data quality as well as structural changes to science berthing that created an alternative emergency escape route.
 - Agent of change - After the most recent OMAO Safety Climate Survey, CDR X personally initiated and chaired an ad hoc committee that took a look at a broad range of topics from perceived discrimination to hiring and retention practices and - after including the COs of four other ships - released an advisory memo to Marine Operations on proposed courses of actions to address these concerns. The impact CDR X had on NOAA Ship Y itself is also profound: the differences between pre- and post-CoC safety surveys show substantial quantitative and qualitative improvements across all survey topics.
 - NOAA Culture - CDR X demonstrates a clear commitment to the NOAA family and created a sponsorship program for both officers and wage mariners to provide a more personal and professional check-in and familiarization process. Their focus on the NOAA family did not end at the gangway: prior to each field season, CDR X personally oversaw the planning and execution of a ship BBQ and established a digital rapport with each crewmember's family so that future issues could be quickly addressed.
- Proposed Citation: For outstanding meritorious service while serving as Commanding Officer, NOAA Ship Y. Commander X's exceptional professionalism, personal initiative, and loyal devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the NOAA Commissioned Corps.

NOAA Corps Commendation Medal (NCCM)

- Context: For sustained superior leadership while serving as Commanding Officer aboard NOAA Ship A.
- Justification:
 - Set the highest of standards to return the vessel to full operational readiness. NOAA Ship A had not sailed for more than a year. CDR X consistently worked with both shore and sea side support to identify steps and procedures needed after such a long pier-side time. Multiple delays handled and communicated expertly throughout the 4 month recovery period. As a direct result of these efforts 95% of DAS sailed and 3 officers acquired the DAS needed to advance in their careers.
 - Took great pride in mentoring and development duties. Consistently held weekly officer

and crew meetings to assist with individual goals and aspirations of each member of the vessel. Prepared the entire ship to “learn up” on their duties resulting in the ability for 2 periods of fleeting up for all 4 members of the wardroom and providing opportunities for continued professional growth throughout.

- Advocating for zero tolerance workplace abuse policies, quickly began appropriate actions to resolve reports counter to NOAA’s workplace conduct policy, resulting in both 1 voluntary separation and 1 termination. Liaised with DOC and OMAO resources to deal with less severe conflicts. These consistent actions to uphold the standard have led to dramatically improved shipboard climates and safer workplace for all aboard.
- Cornerstone of leadership and persistence. Continual presence displayed dedication to the ship and mission - demonstrated during an 18 hour panama canal transit CDR X was on the bridge and available throughout. Advocated for the unique opportunity to sail the canal which led to 10 additional personnel aboard not only getting experience but also allowing for reducing individual workload throughout each department.
- Proposed Citation: For exceptional and sustained leadership throughout your assignment as Commanding Officer, NOAA Ship A. Your unyielding commitment to the crew, officers and mission resulted in better outcomes and consistent superior performance.

NOAA Corps Achievement Medal (NCAM - Service Award)

- Context: ENS X served as a Junior Officer aboard NOAA Ship A through the 2020 and 2021 field seasons, culminating in XXX days at sea, excelling in all collateral duties, and earning her OOD qualification ahead of schedule.
- Achievements:
 - Superb performance as Environmental Compliance Officer aboard NOAA Ship A. Led 15 crew training seminars and stand downs, and 10 realistic spill drills at sea and in port. Efforts yielded and educated a highly trained crew, resulting in rapid containment during two minor incidents at sea and in port, with no overboard discharge. On their own initiative, they reorganized scattered shipboard spill supplies into 15 well organized, strategically placed kits, enabling rapid response.
 - As Navigation Officer, efficiently managed the ship's paper and electronic chart suite, and prepared thorough comprehensive passage plans in consultation with both the CO and FPC. Demonstrated effective flexibility; often called out to alter approved navigation tracks “on the fly” to accommodate intense traffic, weather, and operations in the dynamic environment in the Pacific/Atlantic Ocean/Gulf of Mexico. Mentored JO to assume full duties with no disruption seen by Command.
 - As Dive Officer, restored the dive unit to full operational status, enabling the ship to utilize the dive team to conduct routine ship husbandry tasks, saving \$5K in contract diving costs. This action also enabled the ship to conduct an immediate dive response at sea to inspect the bow thruster after suspected gear entanglement, resulting in the ability to remain underway on project with no interruption to operations.
 - Quickly developed skills as bridge officer, earning Underway OOD designation ahead of Command deadline, growing into a skilled and capable OOD. Provided calm, patient guidance to new bridge watch officers, junior and senior, to ensure clear expectations, fostering a positive learning environment while operating in congested waters. Routinely

serves as Command's top choice to conn ship during difficult transits, requiring minimal guidance.

- Proposed Citation: For sustained superior performance while serving as Junior Officer aboard NOAA Ship A.

NOAA Corps Achievement Medal (NCAM - Achievement Award)

- Context: ENS X went above and beyond their role as Environmental Compliance Officer (ECO) aboard NOAA Ship A, by demonstrating leadership and initiative in support of the Marine Operations Environmental Management Branch (EMB), the X National Marine Sanctuary, and ECO workshop.
- Justification:
 - ENS X accepted responsibility to manage oily rag pickups for the MOC-A/P upon the sudden vacancy of the Port Captain. They quickly organized, implemented, and managed a streamlined process for collection and disposal scheduling, worked with EMB to obtain \$3,562 in funding, and ensured oily rags were stored correctly. Coordinating with MOC-A/P ship ECOs, they provided outstanding shore support services to 4 NOAA Ships.
 - Further took the initiative to redesign the inadequate hazardous waste management system at MOC-A/P. Economizing on EMB funding of just \$340, they purchased storage bins and labels and reorganized the HAZMAT locker to meet all regulatory requirements, resulting in a safe waste storage space. Additionally, they reorganized the documentation and storage process, educated MOC-A/P ships, and established a well-managed, smooth system for the new Port Captain.
 - During a visit to X National Marine Sanctuary while on leave, they provided accurate, thorough guidance on spill response equipment needs and procedural assistance, including 3 emergency spill response kits for their vessels and dock. They also created a binder with personalized Spill Response Checklists for the facility and gave the boat captain a full walk through of the binder & equipment, resulting in a robust spill response program for X NMS.
 - Provided outstanding support to the 20XX ECO Workshop, a dense and fast-paced training course, by regularly volunteering their experience with students, discussing the laws and regulations which effectively conveyed the purpose for requisite day-to-day tasks of an ECO. Shared tips and tools on time/relationship management, and conveyed the magnitude of responsibility the role maintains, led to a clear "deck plate" understanding of ECO roles.
- Proposed Citation: For outstanding achievements in support of the Marine Operations Environmental Management Branch, the X National Marine Sanctuary, and as Environmental Compliance Officer aboard NOAA Ship X to maximize environmental compliance and readiness throughout the NOAA fleet.

NOAA Corps Director's Ribbon (NCDR) - Achievement Award

- Context: In anticipation of his upcoming OPS tour, LTJG X volunteered to augment aboard NOAA Ship A to gain ship and job familiarity. When the permanent OPS Officer was unable to sail due to a family emergency, LTJG X immediately assumed the OPS role and, despite an

abbreviated passdown, excelled through the entire Y project.

- Justification:
 - LTJG X immediately took charge and helped to coordinate the 23 person science party and crew moving on board to the ship. He familiarized himself with the layout of the ship while also directing scientists to rooms and helping them to get the labs set up. He additionally helped to orient a brand new permanent survey tech who had just arrived on the ship.
 - LTJG X dove into the day-to-day role of OPS while also standing 8 hours of bridge watch and training for his OOD letter. He conducted daily meetings with the scientists where he both learned about and coordinated their scientific operations. When some of the science party arrived late due to positive COVID tests, he arranged a small boat pick up and helped to schedule the ship time and operations so we would be in the correct area at the time.
 - Once the permanent OPS arrived half way through the cruise, they fledged up to A-XO, immediately leaving LTJG X to remain in the role of sole operations officer for the rest of the cruise. He continued to excel including coordinating complicated permitting issues, leading the survey department through another personnel change, and smoothing scientists' fears when the ship changed its arrival location two weeks before the cruise finished.
- Proposed Citation: For his flexibility, initiative, and willingness to step up and assume the role of sole Operations Officer while augmenting aboard the NOAA Ship X during the 2021 Y project.

NOAA Corps Director's Ribbon (NCDR) - Achievement Award

- Context: ENS X volunteered to assist with the filming and production of the Uniformed Services Blended Retirement System (BRS) Opt-in Course. This course is mandatory for members of the Uniformed Services with fewer than 12 years of service.
- Justification:
 - ENS X played a service member role throughout the two hour online course. As of 14 Aug 2019, more than 567,000 service members have completed the training.
 - ENS X's participation in the filming of the video greatly added to the clarity of the system's explanation and increased participants' understanding of the new system. The active or reserve service members who complete the online Opt-in Course receive an intangible benefit of education for their career and financial future. These service members are able to better understand their individual retirement options, subsequently, a tangible benefit.
 - ENS X's participation in the BRS video brought the training home to NOAA Corps members and made a direct impact that this information pertained to NOAA as much as the other Uniformed Services. In a sense, by knowing someone in the video, it made the information real, greatly increasing the retention of NOAA Corps officers.
- Proposed Citation: In recognition of ENS X's contribution to the Uniformed Services of the United States during his volunteer-acting role for the Uniformed Services Blended Retirement System Opt-in Course.