



**DEFENSE SUPPORT SERVICES CENTER
EMPLOYER SUPPORT OF THE GUARD AND RESERVE
4800 MARK CENTER DRIVE, SUITE 05E22
ALEXANDRIA, VA 22350-4000**

OPERATING INSTRUCTION

SUBJECT: Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) Operating Instruction 1250.30, "Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award"

- References:**
- (a) DoD Instruction 1205.22, "Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR)," February 6, 2017
 - (b) ESGR Operating Instruction 1250.21, "Statement of Support Program," March 27, 2020
 - (c) Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) Instruction 1250.30, "Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award," January 7, 2021 (hereby canceled)
 - (d) United States Code, Title 5, Section 574 (also known as the "Administrative Dispute Resolution Act," as amended)
 - (e) United States Code, Title 38, Chapter 43 (also known as the "Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA)," as amended)

1. PURPOSE

To specify the selection process for the annual Secretary of Defense (SecDef) Employer Support Freedom Award (ESFA).

2. APPLICABILITY

This operating instruction applies to all National Guard and Reserve members, Headquarters (HQ) ESGR, all ESGR state committees (SCs), and members of the Finalist Review.

3. INFORMATION COLLECTION

- 3.1. Secretary of Defense Awards referred to in file number 212-17 of Office of the Secretary of Defense Deposition Schedule Series 200 titled Management and Operations, has been assigned report control symbol DAA-0330-2016-0010-0002 in accordance with the procedures in Volume 1 of DoD Manual 8910.01.
- 3.2. In accordance with DoD Administrative Instruction (AI) 15, "OSD Records and Information Management Program," section 212-17, Secretary of Defense Awards (Non-Competitive/Competitive), files pertaining to awards authorized and approved by the Secretary of Defense including nomination memorandum and description of achievements and recommendations, as appropriate, are permanent and cut off annually, in the calendar year upon which the final determination (approval/disapproval) was made. These records will be transferred to the National Archives and Records Administration 25 years after cutoff.
(<https://www.esd.whs.mil/RIM/>)

4. DEFINITIONS

- 4.1. Finalist Review: Comprised of senior DoD officials and other stakeholders, as listed in paragraph 7.9 of this instruction, who may recommend to the Secretary of Defense up to 15 ESFAs to employers.
- 4.2. Types of Employers
 - 4.2.1. Small businesses: have 499 employees or less and can be publicly or privately held entities organized for profit or non-profit.
 - 4.2.2. Large businesses: have 500 or more employees and can be publicly or privately held entities organized for profit or non-profit.
 - 4.2.3. Public sector employers: government agencies (Federal, state, and local) that hire employees to fulfill official functions and perform public services, such as law enforcement, public education, and public safety
- 4.3. Personal interest means interests that can bring, or that may be perceived to bring, directly or indirectly, benefits or disadvantages to the member as an individual, or to others whom the member may want to benefit or disadvantage. A personal interest might be a private, professional, or business interest as defined in this instruction.
- 4.4. Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award (ESFA): The highest recognition given by the U.S. Government to employers for their outstanding support of employees serving in the National Guard and Reserve. Each year, members of the Guard and Reserve, or a designated individual acting on their behalf, may nominate their employer for the ESFA.
- 4.5. Semi Finalist Review: Comprised of HQ ESGR staff and volunteers who review nominations submitted from the SCs and recommend a maximum of 30 nominations and 6 alternates for the Finalist Review. The state or territory will use objective criteria established by ESGR HQ to review the information provided by the nominator and recommend the nominations it submits for the Semi Finalist Review.

5. ACRONYMS

| | |
|----------|---|
| DoD | Department of Defense |
| DPFSC | Defense Personnel and Family Support Center |
| DASD(RI) | Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Integration |
| ED | Executive Director |
| ESFA | Employer Support Freedom Award |
| ESGR | Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve |
| FAN | Freedom Award Nomination (System) |
| HQ | Headquarters |

| | |
|--------|---|
| ICMS | Inquiry and Case Management System |
| MMS | Member Management System |
| SC | State Committee |
| SecDef | Secretary of Defense |
| USERRA | Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights |
| Act VS | Volunteer Support |
| VST | Volunteer Support Technician |

6. POLICY

- 6.1. The SecDef ESFA is the highest recognition given to employers in the United States and U.S. Territories who have demonstrated exceptional support to their employees serving in the National Guard and Reserve.
- 6.2. The SecDef ESFA is presented annually to top employers who have demonstrated strict compliance with the Uniformed Service Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) and go significantly above and beyond what is required by USERRA.
- 6.3. The term “Freedom Award” only refers to the SecDef ESFA.
- 6.4. No other awards associated with or presented by ESGR may contain the phrase “Freedom Award.”

7. RESPONSIBILITIES

- 7.1. Director, Defense Support Service Center (DSSC):
 - 7.1.1. Serves as the Chair of the Secretary of Defense ESFA, Finalist Review per procedures in this instruction.
 - 7.1.2. Approves the EFSA selection process established by the ESGR Executive Director (ED).
- 7.2. ESGR ED
 - 7.2.1. Establishes the selection process for the ESFA.
 - 7.2.2. Extends invitation to Finalist Review members at least 4 weeks prior to the chosen date of the Review.
 - 7.2.3. Provides a list of past winners to the Finalist Review for use in their selection.
 - 7.2.4. Provides a selection process and timeline briefing to the DASD(RI) each calendar year.
 - 7.2.5. Provides all administrative and information technology support for the

initial nomination process, Semi Finalist Review, and Finalist Review.

7.2.6. Forwards the results of the Finalist Review to the SecDef.

7.2.7. Once approved by the SecDef, informs all ESFA recipients of their selection.

7.2.8. Develops, plans, and executes the timeline in Appendix 1 that provides an appropriate award recognition ceremony.

7.2.9. Provides funding for recipient and nominator travel.

7.2.10. ED and National Chair notify the State Chairs of the winners.

7.3. ESGR Deputy ED will notify State Chairs of the non-select employers.

7.4. Chief, Volunteer Support (VS):

7.4.1. Assists ESGR ED in obtaining the funding authorization in support of ESFA from the appropriate authority at the beginning of each award year.

7.4.2. Processes all staffing actions associated with funding.

7.4.3. Ensures compliance with official representation funds ratios for invitational travel, meetings, and events by reviewing the invitation list prior to final approval.

7.4.4. Conducts a post-event audit to ensure invitational travel, meeting, and event compliance with official representation funds ratios.

7.5. Initial State Review:

7.5.1. Initial State Review process is outlined in Appendices 2 and 3 of this instruction.

7.5.2. The State Chair serves as the head of the Initial State Review, unless he/she appoints another ESGR volunteer.

7.5.3. Consists only of ESGR volunteers assigned by the State Chair.

7.5.4. Initial State Review members having a personal interest in a nomination must recuse themselves from making a recommendation about that employer.

7.5.5. Reviews all nominations within the Freedom Award Nomination (FAN) web application as soon as possible. Each member must evaluate every nomination individually in the FAN.

7.5.6. Verifies the accuracy of information provided by the nominator.

7.5.7. Consolidates all members' scores onto a single master scoresheet.

- 7.5.8. Sends the master scoresheet to the HQ ESGR regional team for review and approval.
- 7.5.9. Once approved, submits nominations via FAN to the Semi Finalist pursuant to the timeline in Appendix 1.
 - 7.5.9.1. Comments shall include any information the Initial State Review determines to be relevant.
 - 7.5.9.2. ESGR will not accept additional information beyond the nomination, Chair comments, and the executive summary.
- 7.5.10. Forwards up to three nominations to the Semi Finalist Review. One from each of the following categories:
 - 7.5.10.1. Small Business.
 - 7.5.10.2. Large business.
 - 7.5.10.3. Public sector employer.

7.6. The Semi Finalist Review:

- 7.6.1. Identifies 30 finalists to forward to the Finalist Review with an emphasis on selecting/including at least 10 finalists for each employer category. The Semi Finalist Review will also identify six alternates two in each employer category.
- 7.6.2. Is chaired by the ESGR Chief, VS.
- 7.6.3. Is comprised of 12 total members. Six HQ ESGR staff members selected by the ESGR Chief, VS, and six volunteers. Volunteers of the Year receive preference to serve as a member of the Semi Finalist Review.
- 7.6.4. Semi Finalist Review members review nominations by category. Two HQ ESGR staff members and two volunteers review each category.
- 7.6.5. VS compiles a list of all organizations that received multiple nominations and includes the number of total nominations received on the executive summary.
- 7.6.6. Sorts semifinalist submissions by category for review by Semi Finalist Review members.
- 7.6.7. Each Semi Finalist Review member evaluates the nominations in their category and provides their scores to the Semi Finalist Review action officer. Any tie scores in the top 36 is discussed by category with the members to distinguish the rank order.
- 7.6.8. ESGR Chief, VS, approves the 30 Finalists and 6 alternates, then forwards the list to Chief, Ombudsman Services and Chief, Public Affairs for review.

7.6.9. The Semi Finalist Review action officer collects the complete nomination package and executive summaries for the 30 finalists and forwards to the Finalist Review at least 2 weeks prior to the established date.

7.7. Chief, Ombudsman Services:

7.7.1. Conducts a USERRA compliance review of all 30 finalists and 6 alternates.

7.7.2. Reviews and provides recommendations maintaining confidentiality.

7.7.3. If a finalist does not comply with USERRA, an alternate employer will substitute as a finalist.

7.8. Public Affairs:

7.8.1. Conducts web searches for information for positive and adverse information about the 30 finalists and 6 alternates.

7.8.2. Reviews and ensures executive summaries format is correct, clearly written, and free of spelling and grammatical errors for the Finalist Review.

7.9. The Finalist Review:

7.9.1. Consists of the following participants:

7.9.1.1. Chair – DSSC Director. DSSC Director or the appointed representative.

7.9.1.2. Vice Chair - ESGR National Chair or the appointed representative.

7.9.1.3. Senior Department of Labor, Veterans Employment and Training Representative or the appointed representative.

7.9.1.4. Director, Army National Guard or the appointed representative.

7.9.1.5. Director, Air National Guard or the appointed representative.

7.9.1.6. Chief, Army Reserve or the appointed representative.

7.9.1.7. Chief, Navy Reserve or the appointed representative.

7.9.1.8. Commander, Marine Forces Reserve or the appointed representative.

7.9.1.9. Chief, Air Force Reserve or the appointed representative.

7.9.1.10. Director, Reserve and Military Personnel Policy, U.S. Coast Guard or the appointed representative.

7.9.1.11. Senior Enlisted Advisor (rotating position from Seven RCs) or the appointed representative.

7.9.1.12. HQ ESGR Support staff:

7.9.1.12.1. Senior recorder

7.9.1.12.2. Assistant recorder

7.9.1.12.3. Two Administrative Assistants

7.9.2. Review all nomination packages during the last 2 weeks of March.

7.9.3. Finalist Review participants must individually evaluate every nomination and each participant's recommendations will be individually recorded.

7.9.4. The Chair of the Finalist Review Recommends up to 15 award recipients for consideration by SecDef.

7.9.5. Recommends a minimum of five employers from each category for final selection.

7.9.6. Recommends one alternate in each category.

8. ESFA Eligibility

8.1. Service members serving in the National Guard or Reserve, or a designated individual acting on behalf of the Service member are the only individuals who can nominate an employer.

8.2. Nominating Service members must be a member of the Guard or Reserve during the calendar year of the nomination.

8.3. For employers with facilities in multiple locations, ESGR will recognize and notify the organization's corporate headquarters if it is in a state other than the nominator's work site, except in the case of an independently owned and operated franchise.

8.4. Only employers in the United States and U.S. Territories under USERRA are eligible for the ESFA.

8.5. Employers in which individuals affiliated with ESGR (staff, volunteers, or family members) have a personal interest are ineligible.

8.6. An employer can receive the ESFA once, unless the recipient merges with another company resulting in the other company having controlling interest. Companies that are subsidiaries of a corporation that received the ESFA are eligible if the benefits to Service members and employment policies are different from the parent company. ESGR will make a final determination on a case-by-case basis, also taking into account the governance structure of the subsidiary.

9. EFFECTIVE DATE: Effective immediately. This instruction will be reviewed by ESGR on an annual basis.

Jonathan R. Townsend, CAPT, USN
Executive Director

Appendix 1: Employer Support Freedom Award Timeline


| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Oct 1 | Nomination Season Opens |
| Dec 31 | Nomination Season Closes |
| Jan 1 | SCs begin formal review process |
| Second Monday in Feb | SCs recommendations are due to HQ ESGR with Executive Summaries |
| Last 2 weeks of Feb | Semi Finalist Review |
| Last 2 weeks of Mar | Finalist Review |
| NLT Apr 15 | Forward Finalist Review Recommendation to SecDef for Approval |
| First 2 weeks of Jun Aug | Formal Announcement of Recipients Host the Appropriate Ceremony |

Appendix 2: State Committee Initial State Review

- 1) The review process of ESFA nominations, at the state level, will be conducted by a formal Initial State Review. The Initial State Review will be made up of no more than eight ESGR volunteers appointed by the State Chair. Each member must evaluate every nomination individually. The Initial State Review will determine what evaluation method they will use, i.e. ranking the nominations (1 through X) or assigning a numeric score (100 down to 0). The Initial State Review can also be subdivided into reviewing large business, small business, and public sector employer nomination teams.
- 2) Ranking/scoring is recorded via downloading a nomination report from the FAN site. The nomination report lists all companies nominated to date. An example of the report with simulated ranking is in Appendix 3. This single sheet can be used by each Initial State Review member to record their individual rank/score for every nomination. Each Initial State Review member will forward rank/score to their respective volunteer support technician (VST) or committee representative.
- 3) Once the VST or committee representative receives all Initial State Review scoresheets, scores are consolidated into one master scoresheet as in Appendix 3. The master scoresheet should be arranged in order, but still include each member's individual rank/score for every nomination.
- 4) The VST or committee representative will forward the master scoresheet to their State Chair, for review. The State Chair notifies the VST or committee representative to forward the recommendations to the HQ ESGR regional team.
- 5) The VST or committee representative sends the master scoresheet to their respective HQ ESGR regional team, for review and approval (making sure to remove all PII before sending). Allow 3 business days for the HQ ESGR regional team to review.
- 6) The HQ ESGR regional team approves each nomination and notifies the SC to officially submit their approved nominations via FAN. The state committee completes executive summaries for each nomination and any alternates.

Appendix 3: Sample Initial State Review Roster with ranking

The total points below are assigned by the FAN site as part of the online review process.

 (Ranking / Scoring by Vol)

| Nominatio nID | Total Points | CivilEmployerN ame | CivilE mploye rState | Nominat orServic e | CivilEmplo yerCategor y | Vol - Susan | Vol - Bob | Vol - Jeff | V ol - A bb y | V ol Ma uri ce | T ot al |
|------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| 2502 | 100 | Archer Daniels | Louisia | Army | Large Business | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| 2485 | 99 | Barclays | Louisia | Army | Large Business | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| 2631 | 98 | Callison Tighe | Louisia | Air Force | Small Business | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| 2624 | 97 | Chevron | Louisia | Coast | Large Business | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| 2494 | 96 | Cracker Barrel | Louisia | Air | Large Business | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 2 |
| 2575 | 95 | Delta Solutions | Louisia | Marine | Small Business | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 3 |
| 2697 | 94 | Direct Supply, | Louisia | Air Force | Large Business | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 3 |
| 2522 | 93 | Eversource | Louisia | Air Force | Large Business | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 4 |
| 2463 | 92 | Houston Police | Louisia | Army | Public Sector | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 4 |
| 2674 | 91 | Kauai Auto | Louisia | Army | Small Business | 10 | 10 | 10 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| 2526 | 91 | Levi Rodgers | Louisia | Army | Small Business | 11 | 11 | 11 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| 2636 | 91 | LG&E and KU | Louisia | Army | Large Business | 12 | 12 | 12 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| 2694 | 91 | Nationwide | Louisia | Army | Large Business | 13 | 13 | 13 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| 2598 | 91 | The Steel | Louisia | Army | Small Business | 14 | 14 | 14 | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| 2697 | 91 | West Valley | Louisia | Air Force | Public Sector | 15 | 15 | 15 | 1 | 1 | 7 |

The total of ranking / scoring are indicated to the right. 

CHANGE AND REVIEW LOG

Review the Instructions at least annually to ensure:

- (a) References are current
- (b) Changes in procedures are documented
- (c) Necessary revisions are published

Maintain this record throughout the life of the document.

| Date | Author | Version | Reason |
|--------|------------|---------|---|
| Dec 27 | Frank Huff | 1 | Update to general admin data and format |
| Dec 27 | Frank Huff | 1 | Paragraph 7.5 updated to eliminate alternate nominations by State Committees |
| Dec 27 | Frank Huff | 1 | Paragraph 7.6 Limit the 30 nominations going forward to 10 in each category. Alternates increased from 5 to 6 with 2 in each category |
| Dec 27 | Frank Huff | 1 | Paragraph 7.9 updated to allow all members of the Finalist Review to appoint a representative in their place as needed. |
| Feb 2 | Frank Huff | 4 | Format changes and updated ED signature block |
| Mar 6 | Frank Huff | 5 | Updated 7.9.4 to reflect the Chair of the Finalist Review. |
| | | | |