



Division of Research Staff Excellence Awards

Each year, a select group of staff is honored through the Division of Research Staff Excellence Awards. This year's awards will be presented to outstanding Division staff members. If you are interested in nominating a Division of Research staff member, please read the guidelines provided to learn more about the process.

Division of Research Staff Excellence Award Guidelines

UH or Division of Research staff or faculty may submit a nomination for an eligible Division of Research staff member. The nomination web form must be completed in full by the nominating party for the nomination to be accepted. **This form requires a statement addressing each of the following areas:**

- Superior job performance and proficiency in the area of responsibility, such as knowledge, skills and abilities
- Outstanding personal traits (such as dedication, loyalty, reliability, courtesy, honesty, and initiative)
- Continuous demonstration of service concepts necessary to support the community, their profession and/or committees in such a way that has an impact on the Division and the University whether directly or indirectly
- Initiative in making improvements in work methods, standards or operations; or in developing new programs, services, or cost savings which enhance or support their department and the University
- Ability to shape, drive or facilitate successful team work and/or outcomes
- Exceptional customer service internally and/or externally to the University
- Contribution to student success, directly or indirectly
- Impact this individual has on the Division and the University as a whole

All benefits-eligible, Division of Research staff with at least one year of service within DOR are eligible for nomination regardless of job classification, title or level within the Division.

Additional Guidelines on Nominations

- Collaborate with colleagues in your department and in DOR to submit a collective nomination for a nominee or to obtain additional supporting information for your submission. We encourage you to add in previous Kudos, recommendation letters, letters of support, and any certificates to help strengthen your nomination.
- Make your responses stand out. Give details and specific examples as to why your nominee should win. Make every sentence count!
- The selection subcommittee is relying on your words and examples to “see” your nominee’s attributes and contributions.
- Remember, the selection subcommittee members may not know anything about your nominee’s job, so detailed information is key.
- The recommended word count range for each response should be around 150-250 words.
- Avoid sweeping generalities (i.e., “She’s a hard worker”, or “He goes above and beyond his job duties”). Make every sentence count.

Weak vs. Strong examples:

- **Weak:** “She always celebrates diversity”.
- **Strong:** “She was responsible for organizing the school’s first multicultural training, an annual Cinco de Mayo celebration and organized assemblies featuring speakers of different cultural backgrounds”.
- **Weak:** “Matt always sets a good example and inspires others.”
- **Strong:** “Earlier this year, Matt asked if he could put together a “best practices” training manual to share with the campus training offices. He jumped at the opportunity to research tax law changes that would directly impact employees and took pride in being able to create new classes to educate our employees. His efforts not only benefitted the entire department, but they also set an example and inspired his co-workers to stay pro-active on their topics. It’s those qualities that led him to be promoted to the lead technician position earlier this year and his acceptance into the Excellence in Leadership Program. Although Matt does not have the official designation of “supervisor” in his job title, he has proven himself to be the go-to-guy for all other training staff. He regularly volunteers to mentor new hires, both in the training department and in the payroll counseling department.”

Additional Guidelines on Nominations

- **Weak:** “Mary creates and conducts classes related to payroll and benefits and provides trainings at all four campuses. She is great at meeting project deadlines and milestones and goes above and beyond in sharing her expertise.”
- **Strong:** “Mary is the lead technician on the payroll education team. She is directly responsible for creating and conducting in-person and one-on-one classes regarding understanding payroll deductions, including taxes, benefits and retirement savings. In the past year, we’ve experienced a number of tax regulation changes that affect all employees’ paychecks and before I could even tell her to, Mary had created two new employee classes that addressed these changes. Furthermore, she volunteered to be the trainer who would travel to all four campuses and the new information to employees. Because there was a lot of travel involved, Mary had to arrive early and sometimes stay late to accomplish this. The department is also undergoing a review of the optional retirement plan offerings and Mary volunteered to serve on the steering committee which has been tasked with reviewing all plans and vendors. Throughout this project, she has consistently met established project deadlines and milestones. I don’t know of anyone else more qualified to lend her expertise than Mary.”

FAQ's

Who can be nominated?

All benefits-eligible, Division of Research staff with at least one year of service within DOR, including Centers and Institutes, are eligible for nomination regardless of job classification, title, level, or department within the Division (benefits-eligible staff with a home department within DOR or a DOR Center and Institute). A listing of previous award winners is attached.

What are the qualifications necessary for award consideration?

Each award recognizes meritorious service, dedication, and contribution to the Division of Research and the University of Houston beyond the requirements and expectations of the job. Characteristics of a staff's performance which contribute to excellence include:

1. Superior job performance and proficiency in the area of responsibility, such as knowledge, skills and abilities
2. Outstanding personal traits (such as dedication, loyalty, reliability, courtesy, honesty, and initiative)
3. Continuous demonstration of service concepts necessary to support the community, their profession and/or committees in such a way that has an impact on Division and the University whether directly or indirectly
4. Initiative in making improvements in work methods, standards or operations; or in developing new programs, services, or cost savings which enhance or support their department and the University
5. Ability to shape, drive or facilitate successful team work and/or outcomes
6. Exceptional customer service internally and/or externally to the University
7. Contribution to student success, directly or indirectly
8. Impact this individual has on the Division and the University as a whole.

What are the categories of awards?

There will be three awards given to Division of Research staff, two from DOR Central departments and one from a DOR Center and Institute.

How do I complete a nomination form?

[CLICK HERE](#)

Be sure to log in to Office 365 with your
username: (username)@cougarnet.uh.edu

No signatures are required for approval since the form is electronic.

What is the deadline for submitting nominations?

Completed nominations must be received by the Division of Research no later than 5 p.m. on Tuesday, February 24, 2026. Only information provided on the approved forms will be accepted.

Who selects the winners?

The Division of Research Staff Excellence Award Selection Committee as approved by the Vice Chancellor/ Vice President for Research will evaluate all completed nomination materials submitted and select a total of three Staff Excellence Award winners.

What does a Division of Research Staff Excellence Award winner receive?

Winners will receive a plaque and a monetary award of \$500.

DOR Staff Excellence Award Winners
(Program established in 2017)

2017:

- DOR Central: Sharon Kuang, Accountant III, Business Operations
- DOR Central: Grace Rosanes, Assistant Director, Research Financial Services

2018:

- DOR Central: Lindsay Lewis, Director, Strategic Research Communications
- DOR Central: Charley Sikes, Assistant Director, Animal Care Operations
- DOR Center/Institute: Brion Jacobs, Web Developer 3, TcSUH

2019:

- DOR Central: Alejandro Briceno, Assistant Business Administrator, Business Operations
- DOR Central: Tom Campbell, Executive Director, Office of Technology Transfer & Innovation
- DOR Central: Laura Gutierrez, Research Compliance Specialist, Research Integrity & Oversight

2020:

- DOR Central: Shelley Phillips, Animal Resources Supervisor, Animal Care Operations
- DOR Central: Ashley Merwin, Executive Assistant to VC/VP for Research and Technology Transfer
- DOR Central: Miguel Tovar, Senior Graphics Designer, Strategic Research Communications

2021:

- DOR Central: Tim Holt, Digital Media Manager, Strategic Research Communications
- DOR Central: Sandy Ulmer, Research Contracts Officer 2, Office of Contracts and Grants
- DOR Center/Institute: Michele Hoffman, Associate Directors, Research Center Administration, TIMES

2022:

- DOR Central: Darnell Thacker, Manager, Full Stack Development, Strategic Research Communications
- DOR Central: Claudia Neuhauser, Associate VC/VP for Research and Technology Transfer
- DOR Center/Institute: Safiya Friday, Program Manager 2, HEALTH Research Institute

2023:

- DOR Central: Alicia Vargas, Senior Specialist, Research Compliance, Research Integrity & Oversight
- DOR Central: Courtney Sands, Clinical Veterinarian, Animal Care Operations
- DOR Center/Institute: Hinal Patel, Program Manager 1, HEALTH Research Institute

2024:

- DOR Center/Institute: Ashika Brinkley, Health Initiative Research Director, HEALTH Research Institute
- DOR Center/Institute: Damien Kelley, Community Education & Outreach Coordinator, HEALTH Research Institute

2025:

- DOR Central: Cris Milligan, Assistant Vice President for Research Administration
- DOR Central, Felicia Bentley, Department Business Administrator, Animal Care Operations
- DOR Center/Institute: Troy Christensen, Program Manager 2, TcSUH