

For: FSA Employees

FY 2024 Quality Step Increase (QSI) Program

Approved by: Administrator



1 Overview

A Background

The total number of FY 2024 QSI's are limited to 2 percent of non-executive employees onboard as of September 30, 2023.

B Purpose

This notice provides:

- the criteria for submitting FY 2024 QSI's for consideration
- the Headquarter (HQ) QSI Review Panel members
- approval and processing guidelines for QSI's.

2 QSI Constraints and Eligibility Criteria

A QSI Constraints

QSI's are reserved for the most exceptional levels of performance. Although there are only two levels of performance in FY 2024 (pass or fail) awarding a QSI will be reserved for employees who had achievements that contributed **substantially** to the organization's goals, commensurate with the classification of their position.

No single achievement merits a QSI. It may be granted only to those employees who have demonstrated sustained exceptional performance, commensurate with the classification of the employee's position.

Agency management reserves the discretion to award a QSI. It is not required or automatically granted to employees who meet the basic eligibility criteria. Agency management must ensure such decisions are made consistently.

Disposal Date	Distribution
March 1, 2025	All FSA employees; State Offices relay to County Offices

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2 QSI Constraints and Eligibility Criteria (Continued)

B Criteria

The first-level supervisor determines if the employee is eligible to receive a QSI.

Note: For CED's, this determination must be made by COC and documented in the COC minutes.

To be eligible for a QSI, an employee must:

- occupy a position that is eligible for within grade increases (WGI) (i.e., GS and FSA CO (non-Federal) employees occupying permanent positions)
- be at the full performance level of the employee's position

Example: An individual hired as a Grade 5/7/9 Program Analyst must be at the Grade 9 level.

- be below step 10 of the employee's grade level
- have performed in the same grade and type of position for at least 18 months before the end of the appraisal cycle

Note: An employee who was reclassified into one of the Program Analyst positions will be considered to have met this criterion if they previously were at the full performance level of the corresponding Program Technician position. For example, a Grade 9 Program Analyst who previously was a Grade 7 Program Technician for at least 16 months before the July reclassification would meet this 18-month criteria.

- have a rating of record of "Fully Successful/Pass" for at least the three most recent performance years (FY 2022 through FY 2024) or the two most recent performance years if the employee is new to the Federal Government
- have sustained performance of the highest quality, significantly and demonstrably above the expectations defined at the "Fully Successful" performance plan level
- have achievements that contributed substantially to the organization's goals, commensurate with the employee's position classification
- be expected to continue the same high level of performance
- have not received a QSI within the previous 104 weeks. A QSI recommendation cannot be effectuated until the 104-week mandatory waiting period is completed.

Note: If an employee is in the process of being promoted within 60 calendar days after the effective date of QSI, check the next salary level to ensure that QSI will **not** be lost.

3 QSI Review and Approval Process

A QSI Review Panels

For HQ employees, the HQ QSI Review Panel consists of the Associate Administrator or the Chief of Staff for the Associate Administrator and the Deputy Administrator, Assistants for DAFO, DAFLP, and DAFP.

For State and county employees, SED's may choose to continue using QSI review panels but are no longer required to do so. Final decisions about QSI's will be made by SED.

B QSI Recommendation Packages

First-line supervisors must ensure that any employee recommended for a QSI meets the criteria in paragraph 2. First-line supervisors are responsible for preparing any QSI recommendation packages, which must include:

- a **full justification** including **AD-3115, "Recommendation and Approval of Quality Step Increase"** with second-level supervisor concurrence:
 - For CED's, the QSI nomination must be concurred by STC or STC delegee for the QSI recommendation package to be considered
 - COC must concur as the second-line supervisor for other County Office employees for the QSI recommendation package to be considered. COC concurrence must also be documented in the COC minutes
- the employee's three most consecutive ratings of record (or two ratings if the employee is new to the Federal Government).

C Allocation Award Pools

Allocation of QSI's will be divided into the following award pools:

- Office of the Administrator (immediate Office of the Administrator and staff offices reporting to the Administrator), DAFLP, DAFO (excluding State and County Offices) and DAFP for a consolidated HQ pool
- each State Office will be provided with two QSI pools, a CO QSI pool, and a GS QSI pool.

Note: The U.S. Virgin Islands are included with the Florida QSI pool.

Each SED may approve up to the allotted number of QSI recommendation packages.

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3 QSI Review and Approval Process (Continued)

D QSI Submission and Review Process

First-line supervisors will submit QSI recommendation packages for review and approval according to the following table.

HQ Employees	State and County Employees
Each Deputy Administrator will consolidate and submit their QSI recommendation packages not to exceed the communicated QSI allocation levels to the Office of Management and Strategy for consolidation by November 12, 2024.	First-line supervisors must submit their QSI recommendation packages to SED, or delegee, no later than October 30, 2024 .
The HQ QSI Review Panel will convene the week of November 18, 2024, to review and provide recommendations on the HQ submissions, according to FPAC-HR guidance.	
QSI's will be authorized by the Associate Administrator who will take into consideration, but not be bound by, the recommendation of the HQ QSI Review Panel. For approved QSI's, the Associate Administrator will sign the AD-3115 and forward to the appropriate Deputy Administrator NLT December 2, 2024.	<p>QSI's will be authorized by SED. SED will sign as the authorizing official in box 18 of the AD-3115 for all approved CO QSI's and as the certifying official in box 17 for all GS QSI's. GS QSI packages must be forwarded to sm.fpac.fsa.dafo@usda.gov for DAFO final approval and signature in box 18. GS AD-3115's must be submitted to DAFO for signature no later than November 8, 2024.</p> <p>SED or delegee must notify DAFO by email to sm.fpac.fsa.dafo@usda.gov of any unused QSI allocation(s) no later than November 8, 2024.</p> <p>If there are returned QSI allocations, DAFO will notify States of the opportunity to request an additional allocation November 11, 2024.</p>
Approved QSI's can be entered into EmpowHR by the first-line supervisor, or the supervisor can send AD-3115 to the HRD Performance Management Team using the Employee Care Center for entry into EmpowHR.	Approved QSI's will be entered into EmpowHR by FSA State Administrative staff no later than November 30, 2024 .

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3 QSI Review and Approval Process (Continued)

E QSI Effective Date

A QSI becomes effective on the first day of the first pay period on or after it is approved by the SPO. QSI's may not be retroactive except to correct an administrative error.

F QSI and WGI Timing

A QSI does not change the effective date of an employee's normal WGI, except when the QSI places the employee in the fourth or seventh step. At either step, the employee would enter a longer waiting period for the next WGI.

When a WGI and QSI are effective on the same day, the WGI will be processed before the QSI.

A QSI may be held for one pay period to benefit a high-performing employee, so that it is processed after a pending WGI.

G QSI and Non-Career Ladder Promotion Timing

For **non-career** ladder promotions only:

- a QSI must be applied to the rate of pay for the position that the rating of record was based on
- if an employee is granted a QSI based on performance at one grade and is competitively promoted before the QSI is made effective, the QSI cannot be applied to the higher grade
- the QSI must be processed before any promotion action with the same effective date
- if the rating of record was based on the employee's performance in a permanent position, and the employee is on a temporary promotion, the QSI cannot be applied to the rate of pay received during a temporary promotion. The employee would receive the QSI after termination of the temporary promotion when the employee returns to the lower-graded position.

4 Contacts

A Contact Information

If there are questions about FY 2024 QSI's, contact the appropriate individual according to this table.

IF...	THEN contact...
State or County Office supervisor	State Administrative/Executive Officer (AO/EO).
SED/AO/EO	amy.webbink@usda.gov.
HQ employee	patrick.spalding@usda.gov.