



Comptroller General of the United States  
Washington, D.C.

## DECISION

Matter of: Career Service Awards Program  
File: B-236040  
Date: October 9, 1990

## DIGEST

Employees attending regional awards ceremony sponsored by the local Federal Executive Board may be reimbursed the cost of the luncheon and related expenses under the Incentive Awards Act.

## DECISION

The issue in this decision is whether an agency may pay the fee charged for those employees attending a regional awards ceremony and luncheon sponsored by a local Federal Executive Board. 1/ For the reasons that follow, we conclude that the fee may be paid by the agency.

In May 1989, the Pittsburgh Federal Executive Board sponsored an awards ceremony to recognize certain federal employees for outstanding achievement in their respective fields. The board charged \$13 per person to cover the costs of the plaques, recognition awards, and lunch for the participants. The Bureau of Mines asks whether the agency employees, who were nominated by their agencies for these awards, along with their supervisors or managers may be reimbursed the fee for attending this ceremony as a "necessary expense" under the Incentive Awards Act, as interpreted in our decision in 65 Comp. Gen. 738 (1986).

## OPINION

As a general rule, an employee may not be paid a per diem allowance or actual subsistence expenses for meals or lodging expenses at the permanent duty station as such expenses are considered personal to the employee. J.D. MacWilliams, 65 Comp. Gen. 508 (1986); 53 Comp. Gen. 457 (1974). However, the Incentive Awards Act authorizes an agency head to pay a cash award and incur necessary expenses for the honorary recognition of employees who meet the stated criteria for such awards. 5 U.S.C. Section 4503.

In 65 Comp. Gen. 738 (1986), we held that the cost of refreshments could be provided from the agency's operating appropriations as a "necessary expense" under 5 U.S.C. Section 4503 where the agency determines that a reception with refreshments, in accordance with Office of Personnel Management regulations, would materially enhance the effectiveness of its awards ceremony. See also B-167835, Nov. 18, 1969, involving the cost of an awards banquet and 66 Comp. Gen. 536 (1987) involving an awards ceremony reception with refreshments.

The awards in this case were not made by the Bureau of Mines and the awards ceremony was not conducted by the Bureau of Mines. However, the awards were based on nominations submitted by each agency in the Pittsburgh area to an interagency coordinating group 2/ and were designed to recognize the employees of those agencies. Thus, in view of our decision in 65 Comp. Gen. 738, we believe the fee charged in connection with the attendance of nominees, award recipients, and supervisors or managers at that ceremony falls within the scope of the Incentive Awards Act. 3/

Accordingly, we conclude that the agency may reimburse those employees who attended the ceremony for the cost of attendance.

Comptroller General of the United States

1/ This decision was requested by Dennis A. Sykes, Chief, Division of Finance, Bureau of Mines, Department of Interior.

2/ Federal Executive Boards are interagency coordinating groups which rely on voluntary participation by its members and which are subject to the oversight of the Office of Personnel Management. See 67 Comp. Gen. 27 (1987); 65 Comp. Gen. 689 (1986).

3/ Such reimbursement would not appear to conflict with the prohibition on interagency financing of boards or commissions. See 67 Comp. Gen. 254 (1988); 67 Comp. Gen. 27 (1987).