

# ASPA Merit Survey Report

August 2025

## Introduction

Between May 28<sup>th</sup> to June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025, ASPA members were invited to participate in a survey aimed at collecting feedback on the ASPA Merit process. A total of 530 people completed the survey. The insight gathered will help the ASPA Executive identify areas for improvements and inform potential priorities for future bargaining.

## Survey Results

### A. Merit Satisfaction

Provided below are the average ratings for various items pertaining to the merit system. Ratings are based on a 6-point scale (1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat disagree, 4=Somewhat agree, 5=Agree, 6=Strongly agree). “Agree” percentages are based on those who indicated somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree. “Disagree” percentages are based those who indicated somewhat disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree.

	Agree	Disagree	Average Rating*
I understand how I can earn merit within my role	72%	28%	4.09
My role includes the ability to go above and beyond my normal duties	85%	15%	4.73
The merit system motivates me to do better in my role	45%	55%	3.16
I feel when I have deserved merit, I have received it	58%	42%	3.60
I feel like the distribution of merit in my unit/department is fair and equitable	47%	53%	3.27
The time it takes to apply for merit is reasonable	67%	33%	3.85
I understand the system for attaining merit	62%	38%	3.71
I am satisfied with the system for attaining merit	37%	63%	2.80
I am satisfied with the amount received for merit	40%	60%	2.92
The merit system benefits ASPA members as a whole	49%	51%	3.33

## B. Fairness and Equity

The following key themes emerged when asked about the ways in which members felt the distribution of merit in their unit/department was not fair or equitable.

- 1 Dependent on role/group/phase or how long a person has been in the role
- 2 Dependent on supervisor favouritism or popularity contest
- 3 Equal distribution rather than performance-based distribution
- 4 Dependent on supervisor advocacy or how closely a person works with their supervisor
- 5 Persons evaluating merit application not understanding role or seeing contributions
- 6 Too few rewards for the number of deserving people
- 7 Not receiving merit when having gone above and beyond
- 8 Dependent on how well application is written rather than actual contributions
- 9 Decision appears to be arbitrary
- 10 Merit seems to always be given to the same people every year

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It feels as though I am competing with my colleagues for merit. That can create an unconscious bias in the way we help each other out and go out of our way to support one another.

ASPA Member

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I have been told in the past by my unit/department that due to the fact I've received merit multiple times, I did not receive it, such that other staff members "can have a chance to get merit."

ASPA Member

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The merit system promotes work above and beyond your main duties so there is no incentive to complete your regular duties. Any activities completed as part of merit one year, become an expected standard and cannot be used to support future merit requests.

ASPA Member

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I know there are people who have received merit who are really doing the bare minimum of their job description, and it is frustrating. Perhaps a peer review as a component of merit would be helpful?

ASPA Member

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The current merit system tends to favour those who work more directly with those deciding merit, while those providing key behind-the-scenes support often go unrecognized. The system can feel discouraging for those who consistently take on additional responsibilities outside their job descriptions without direct acknowledgment.

ASPA Member

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The person who would make that final decision is far removed from my department and really has no idea of what I do. So how can they fairly evaluate me?

ASPA Member

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Merit is a popularity contest. If you don't have a suitable representative lobbying for your merit at these 'meetings', you simply won't get it. You'll never get an explanation why you did or didn't get it.

ASPA Member

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From what I have heard from other members, merit assessment process varies widely across departments/units/teams. As far as I am aware, there is virtually no objective process to assess merit entitlement. Perhaps development of some kind of a universal rubric to help managers/directors objectively assess and justify merit awards would be helpful.

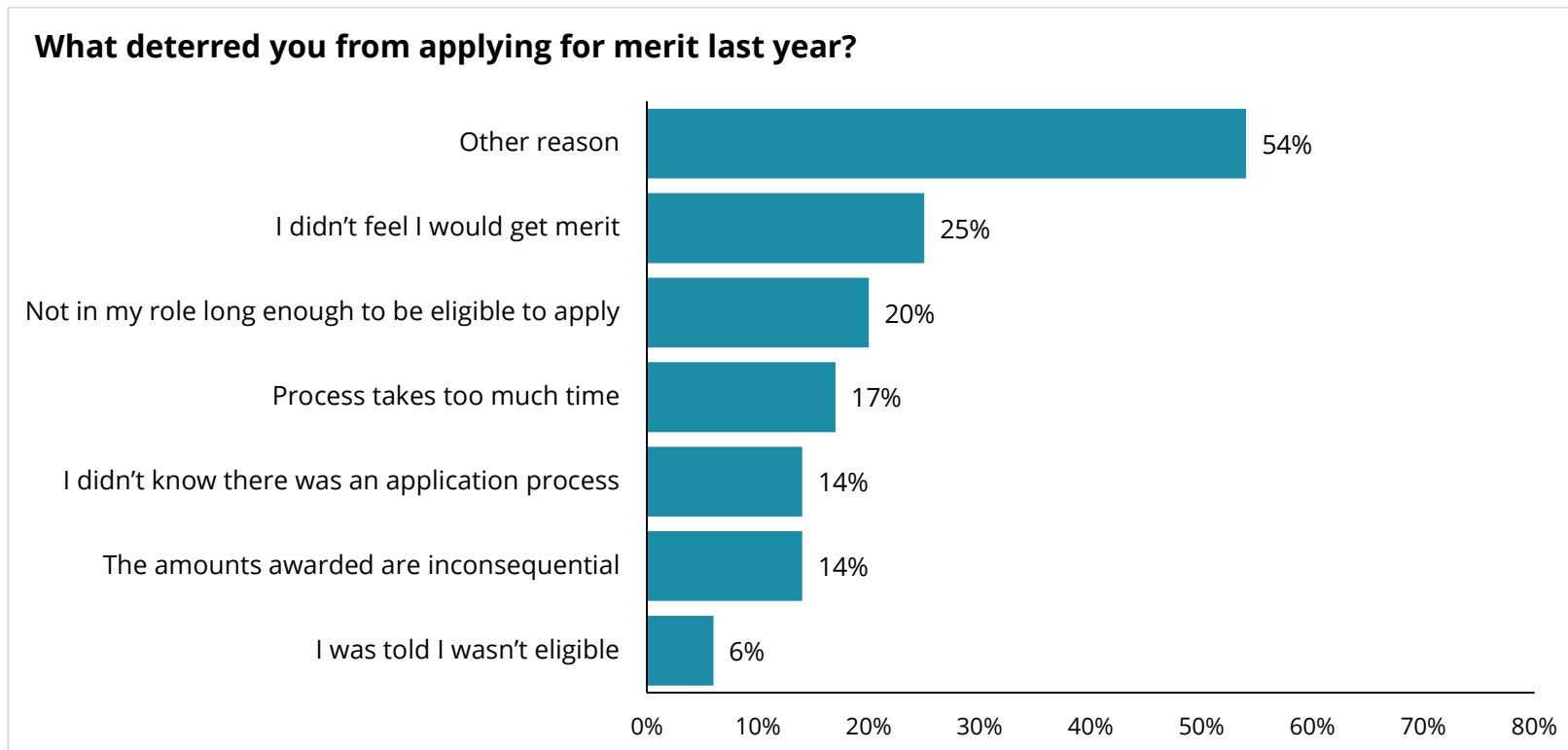
ASPA Member

## C. Applying for Merit

It was found that **61%** of respondents **applied for merit** last year (in 2024). When asked **who completed the merit application** last year, 53% completed the application themselves, 34% completed the application along with their manager/direct report, and 13% indicated that their manager/direct report completed the application for them.

**For those who applied** for merit last year, nearly three quarters (**73%**) indicated they received merit.

**For those who did not apply** for merit last year, one-quarter (**25%**) felt they wouldn't get merit, followed closely by not yet being eligible to apply (20%). Many respondents also provided other reasons for not applying, with the key themes listed below.



For those who indicated “other reason”, regarding reasons for not applying for merit last year, the following key themes emerged.

- 1 The merit system is unfair/unhappy with merit system
- 2 Assumed their direct report applied on their behalf
- 3 No instruction was given on how to apply for merit
- 4 Did not feel comfortable applying on their own behalf
- 5 Did not, or was not able to, take on additional projects
- 6 Felt it should be up to direct report to apply on their behalf
- 7 Wanted to give others a chance to receive merit
- 8 Ineligible due to changing roles or being new to USask
- 9 Felt they deserved merit but did not meet application criteria
- 10 Did not have time to complete merit application

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I felt that it would be better for my team to receive Merit than myself. There could be separate allocations for people leaders and team members so there would not be a conflict.

ASPA Member

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It shouldn't be up to the employee to "apply" for merit, it should be up to leadership within the unit/dept to understand the work of the employees and therefore nominate or just give merit when it's due.

ASPA Member

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Although I get recognized many times throughout the year of doing a great job in my role, as I am not doing anything 'above and beyond' the scope of my job I have nothing to include in justification for merit.

ASPA Member

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Many times my supervisor does not even bring up merit. It seems to be on the employee to know when timelines are and to drive the process of applying for it.

ASPA Member

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My understanding of merit is that you nominate others, and while nominating yourself is an option, I'm not sure if a self-nomination is as valid as being recommended to it by others.

ASPA Member

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Supervisor indicates who they intend to put forward for merit. People can apply on their own but why bother. If the supervisor does not think you should, then you will not have their support anyways, and it will just be a waste of time. I actually prefer this approach as i would rather it be the supervisor putting forward recommendations than everyone applying.

ASPA Member

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In previous units, I have been awarded merit, without even knowing I was eligible, which felt much more earned than bragging about my annual accomplishments and begging for money to prove they were of value did. I struggle with applying for merit every year.

ASPA Member

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Merit does not reflect my accomplishments. It's out of my control. I don't get feedback or a notice of decision. My mental health is not worth going through the merit process.

ASPA Member

## D. ASPA Members in Supervisory Roles

When asked if they were in a supervisory role that may influence merit, 14% of responders answered “yes”. These individuals provided feedback on merit satisfaction from the supervisory perspective (averages are based on a 6-point scale where 1 = strongly disagree and 6 = strongly agree). “Agree” percentages are based on those who indicated somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree. “Disagree” percentages are based on those who indicated somewhat disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree.

	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Average Rating</b>
I understand the system for awarding merit in my unit/college	76%	24%	4.21
I am satisfied with the system for awarding merit in my unit/college	53%	47%	3.26
Merit is a good system that effectively recognizes my highest-performing team members	54%	46%	3.36

## E. Suggestions for Improving the Merit System

The following key themes emerged when asked about the ways in which members felt the merit system could be improved.

- 1 Bring back the option for base salary increases in addition to, or instead of, one-time bonuses
- 2 Set clear expectations for what is merit-worthy, provide opportunities and have work plans and check-ins
- 3 End the merit system in favour of increases for all (e.g. annual salary increments, increases to pension or PSA/HCSA)
- 4 More transparency regarding the merit process, bonus amounts and who is making decisions
- 5 Provide more information and better guidelines on how to complete the merit application (and more time)
- 6 Supervisor nomination for merit, based on performance reviews, rather than employees having to apply themselves

- 7 Increase the number of merit rewards as well as the amount handed out (individually and the pool of merit funding)
- 8 More transparency regarding who received merit and why; reasons for why you did not receive merit
- 9 The merit application form should be revised for criteria, as well as increased consistency and clarity
- 10 Merit should be based on performance reviews and a person's direct report should be aware of their performance

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There should be a simple application form by ASPA to fill out, that is the same for all ASPA employees.

ASPA Member

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The merit system could incorporate feedback from team members who better understand individual contributions. Recognizing behind-the-scenes work, not just visible roles that work directly with leaders, would make the process more equitable.

ASPA Member

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I would like to see something that requires people leaders to include as part of the merit review process a deliberate and thoughtful discussion with employees to specifically identify a project or opportunity that they could work on in the year toward achieving merit.

ASPA Member

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When you are not awarded merit, there should be opportunity to discuss how you can grow in your role and be provided more opportunities to perform these activities.

ASPA Member

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It would be nice if there were merit raises for when additional duties have been taken on long term, not just merit bonuses.

ASPA Member

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Could be a form through ConnectionPoint.

ASPA Member

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Instead of comparing all ASPA members regardless of job function/role I think the system needs to setup to compare people with similar job functions and roles.

ASPA Member



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It would be nice to see the "add to base" option return. One-time bonuses are nice; however, add to base along for long term benefit and recognition.

ASPA Member

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Nominating fellow employees for merit, rather than self-application, would optimize relationships within the unit and ensure those deserving of merit but too modest to apply would be considered.

ASPA Member

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Merit could be included to the salary line to have effects on pension.

ASPA Member

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I think the process should be more basic. You write out an email to your manager discussing the things you did the past year that you think make you eligible for merit. Once that is submitted you sit down with your manager to discuss it before they make the final decision. Gives an opportunity to explain better or justify your comments both ways. I think this would make the process have more accountability for both parties.

ASPA Member

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Ideally, having an unbiased representative review and rank all merit applications would help. I wouldn't expect this to be the only opinion weighted, but it would give another perspective. It would also help to have some sort of summary of what merit was distributed and why to help others understand what creates meritorious work. I would also like to see an opportunity for a check and balance in place. Why or why not a manager chose someone for merit without bias in place.

ASPA Member

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Perhaps if it was less of a hidden allocation at the end and celebrated in the open. So when it is awarded, the person/people who receive it are celebrated in the office. Everyone would know why they got it and then it's not treated like a dirty secret.

ASPA Member

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There should be different pools for different phases or something to avoid the awkwardness of having supervisors recommend employees for awards that they, themselves, are trying to win. It is a clear conflict of interest and anyone I know in those positions hate the experience because they want their staff to be acknowledged but are concerned it may be at the expense of their own recognition.

ASPA Member

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Clarify objectives -- motivate staff to boost performance? outcomes? advance institutional objectives? Define: if performance based -- tie to measurable outcomes. if Team based -- reward teams for collaborative achievements/meeting department goals and divide "equitably". Consider spot bonuses: small, immediate rewards for exceptional contribution. Use objective metrics to minimize bias and regularly audit for equity across departments. Encourage Leaders to recognize contributions publicly -- so team members know who went above and beyond and how / what they achieved to be acknowledged. Transparency and communication.

ASPA Member

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It should be consistent across units - some have staff member submit, some manager submits, some don't submit and still get it. The form changes every year. It's not enough money/significance to truly motivate people.

ASPA Member

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EDI needs to be integrated into the process with people leaders and EDI trained in how to review applications with this lens.

ASPA Member

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Allow for merit in other ways other than taking on additional projects- perhaps more focus on team dynamics, people who create positive workplaces and professional development.

ASPA Member

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I think the distribution should extend past the 25-50% of employee allocation. The minimum merit dollar amounts should also be calculated based on who is deserving of merit. This amount, although lower in dollars to the deserving employees, demonstrates the required appreciated for employees meeting or exceeding merit expectations.

ASPA Member

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Make it more clear who I'm competing against to get merit and how many merit allocations are available to that group I'm competing against.

ASPA Member

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Having members of the committee who decide actually work with you and understand what your role entails.

ASPA Member