



# THE CONGRESSIONAL AWARD GUIDE FOR MILITARY YOUTHS



## What is the Congressional Award?

The Congressional Award is a public-private partnership created by Congress to promote and recognize the achievements of young Americans. The program is non-partisan, voluntary, and non-competitive. Open to youth ages 14 to 24, the Congressional Award challenges youth to set goals in four program areas: Voluntary Public Service, Personal Development, Physical Fitness, and an Expedition or Exploration.

The Congressional Award gives participants the opportunity to build valuable skills such as goal setting, time management, and organization, all while bettering themselves and their communities along the way.

## About the Program

Congressional Award participants work with their advisor to set goals in four areas:

**Voluntary Public Service:** Volunteer at the base, in the community, or abroad.

**Personal Development:** Learn a new skill or strengthen an existing talent.

**Physical Fitness:** Better your physical health in a way that is challenging to you.

**Expedition or Exploration:** Explore a new place or embark on a new challenge.

## What is an Advisor and Validator and How Do I Find One?

- An advisor meets with participants and helps guide them while they set personally challenging goals. The national office recommends asking a family friend, teacher, or coach to be your advisor.
- Validators assist the participant with individual activities and should be knowledgeable in the activities. For example, if a young person's goal and activities involved basketball, a coach would make a suitable validator.
- Participant's advisors and validators may change as they progress through their Congressional Award journey. Any adult may serve with the exception of parents, relatives, and peers.

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## Program Benefits for Military Youth

Since military youth often move many times before graduating, the great part about the Congressional Award's program is that you can bring it with you wherever you go. The program is ideal for military youth because it allows participants to move at their own pace, whether they move locations or change schools. The Congressional Award provides participants, no matter where they live, with a structured, yet flexible, platform to achieve personal goals.

- The program is open to youth ages 14 to 24, regardless of physical and developmental ability, socioeconomic status, citizenship, and grade point average.
- Participants craft an individual achievement plan based on personal goals and interests.
- The program offers six levels, with varying requirements and time commitments, providing built-in flexibility to accommodate the military lifestyle.
- The program offers a constant and continual activity that is not affected by moves and youth may continue to participate even if a parent separates or retires from service.
- Earning the Congressional Award can help set participants apart on college and job applications because it shows commitment to service and personal development.
- It empowers participants to take responsibility, discover new talents, and advocate for themselves and for others.
- The Congressional Award hosts additional program in various areas such as mental health, personal finance, career readiness, and much more.



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## Frequently Asked Questions:

### Can I count the service I do on base or at school?

- Yes! Service goals you achieve on your military base, DoDEA or public school are allowed. To count for the Voluntary Public Service area, the activity should be open and benefit the base community as a whole.

### What happens if I change my address or advisor?

- A significant benefit of the program is the independence and flexibility. Your advisor does not have to be in your same location. If you change your address or advisor along the way, the national office can easily update your information.

### What happens if I move before I completed a goal?

- The Award lets participants take their journey with them wherever they go. If you move, you can either continue your previous goals and find a new activity validator, or start a new goal entirely. If you are moving, taking a short break from goals is allowed.

### Can I participate in earning the Congressional Award if I live abroad?

- Yes! Military youth who live abroad are encouraged to take the challenge and earn the Award. The Congressional Award is able to mail materials abroad and you can register with your APO or other military connected address.



If you have any questions about the Congressional Award,  
please visit our website at [www.congressionalaward.org](http://www.congressionalaward.org)  
or contact the military youth program manager at [mccool@congressionalaward.org](mailto:mccool@congressionalaward.org)

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