



U.S. Congress' Award for Youth

PROGRAM BOOK

The official guide to earning The Congressional Award,
complete with program requirements, best practices, and submission guidelines.

YOUR JOURNEY STARTS HERE.

The United States Congress established Public Law 96-114: The Congressional Award Act on November 16, 1979, to recognize initiative, service, and achievement in young people.

Today, The Congressional Award remains **the highest honor** a member of the U.S. Senate or House of Representatives may bestow upon a youth civilian.

We hope that through your pursuit of this coveted honor, you will not only serve your community and sharpen your own skills, but discover your passions, equip yourself for your future, and see humanity through a new perspective.

YOUR JOURNEY AWAITS.





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#GoForGold



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START YOUR JOURNEY
WWW.CONGRESSIONALAWARD.ORG

GETTING STARTED

Earning The Congressional Award is a proactive and enriching way to get involved. This is not an award for past accomplishments. Instead, youth are honored for setting personally challenging goals and meeting the needs of their community.

The program is non-partisan, voluntary, and non-competitive. Young people may register when they turn 13 1/2 years old, start submitting at age 14, and must complete their activities by their 24th birthday.

Participants earn Bronze, Silver, and Gold Congressional Award Certificates and Bronze, Silver, and Gold Congressional Award Medals. Each level involves setting goals in four program areas: Voluntary Public Service, Personal Development, Physical Fitness, and Expedition.

The Congressional Award is the most comprehensive and flexible of its kind. There is no minimum grade point average requirement, it accommodates young people with special needs or disabilities, and participants complete their activities at their own pace.

1 Register

Register at www.congressionalaward.org.

The day you sign up is the day you may begin counting activities toward the program. Identify an Advisor who agreed to this role before registering.



2 Goals

Work with your Advisor to set goals in each of the four program areas. Start at the Bronze Certificate and progress level by level or go straight for a higher award.

3 Impact

Show your community and yourself what you can do!

Keep track of the hours and months of activity you complete in pursuit of your goals. [Download our Workbook and Activity Log featured on the 'Current Participants' webpage.](#)

4 ✓ Submit

Once you've met the requirements for a level, [submit your Record Book on Submittable for National Office review](#). Review time takes 4-6 weeks for lower levels and 6-8 weeks for the Gold Medal level.

5 Continue

While you're waiting for your Record Book to be reviewed you may continue working on activities toward the next award level.

6 Earn

Once approved, you will be recognized for your Award! Certificates are emailed directly to the awardee and Medals are mailed or presented by your Member of Congress based on member availability and what participants request in their Record Book.



PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

The award level structure is cumulative, meaning hours and months spent on one award level will automatically be counted toward the next level.

In order to earn a particular level of the award, participants must meet the following requirements in ALL four program areas:

CERTIFICATES	Bronze Certificate	Silver Certificate	Gold Certificate
Voluntary Public Service	30 Hours	60 Hours	90 Hours
	No Minimum Months	No Minimum Months	6 Months
Personal Development	15 Hours	30 Hours	45 Hours
	No Minimum Months	No Minimum Months	6 Months
Physical Fitness	15 Hours	30 Hours	45 Hours
	No Minimum Months	No Minimum Months	6 Months
Expedition	1 Day	2 Days	3 Days

MEDALS	Bronze Medal	Silver Medal	Gold Medal
Voluntary Public Service	100 Hours	200 Hours	400 Hours
	7 Months	12 Months	24 Months
Personal Development	50 Hours	100 Hours	200 Hours
	7 Months	12 Months	24 Months
Physical Fitness	50 Hours	100 Hours	200 Hours
	7 Months	12 Months	24 Months
Expedition	2 Day, 1 Night Trip	3 Day, 2 Night Trip	5 Day, 4 Night Trip

HOUR + MONTH REQUIREMENTS

Spread out your hours.

The purpose of the program is to set long-term goals. Your activities should be spread out over the months that you are working toward your goals. The month requirement refers to the months that you are actively working towards your goals in each program area.

You must complete at least 1 hour of activity in a month for that month to count.

Months of activity do not need to be consecutive.

Months in a program area only count once.

Example: If you play ice hockey and soccer and you record hours for both activities in the month of January, you can only count January one time toward your Physical Fitness month requirement. If you are going for the Gold Certificate, January would count as 1 month and you will need to complete 5 other months to meet the 6-month requirement.

No more than eight hours of activity per day.

Example: If your Voluntary Public Service activities include volunteering as a camp counselor, you may only count eight hours per day even if you are spending the night at the camp.



VOLUNTARY PUBLIC SERVICE

Sharing time and talents for the benefit of others



Voluntary Public Service is meant to provide opportunities for you to dive into your community with hands-on volunteer experiences. This requires sensitivity, assessment of needs, and determination.

NO PRIVATE / FOR-PROFIT BUSINESSES

You may not volunteer to work at a private business, such as a law firm, doctor's office, sports camp, or private dance studio as it does not benefit the public.

MUST BE NON-PARTISAN

You may not work for an elected official, promote a politically sensitive issue or volunteer on a political campaign. This includes volunteering for entities with a partisan or issue-based focus.

INDIRECT SERVICE

Indirect service activities include planning, training, and fundraising and can only make up 25% of your total Voluntary Public Service hours. The other 75% must be direct hours, where you are interacting with and providing a direct service to the community you are serving.

FOUNDING A NON-PROFIT

Participants who are establishing their own non-profit organization should contact the National Office to discuss special consideration for the number of indirect hours logged.

ACTIVE HOURS

You may only record hours in which you are actively pursuing your goal. For example, if you train service dogs, you may only count hours spent actively teaching and training the dogs. Simply playing or being with the animal is not deemed service.

NO SPREADING OF FAITH / PROSELYTIZING

Activities coordinated or completed under the direction of a church, synagogue, mosque, or other religious institutions must provide service to the greater community at large. Sunday school or church beautification are activities that only benefit members of that particular institution and cannot be counted toward Voluntary Public Service. In addition, Voluntary Public Service activities completed with a religious institution **MUST NOT** include any religious instruction or proselytizing. However, these activities can be applied to the Personal Development category.

NO COMPENSATION

Voluntary Public Service activities in which you receive compensation or fulfill graduation requirements are not allowed. This includes paid internships and class note-taking for campus services or resource centers.

NO ENTRANCE / MEMBERSHIP FEES

Activities completed through an organization that charges a fee for participants can only be used toward Voluntary Public Service if the organization offers financial aid/scholarships for participants who are not able to afford the fees. For example, if you are volunteering for a club team or sports camp that charges a fee, the organization must provide reduced costs or financial aid for those who cannot afford it.

COMMON ACTIVITIES



Hospitals and Schools



Shelters



Community Clean Up

Use your imagination and make it personal!

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Pursuing a new interest or advancing to another level in an ongoing interest



Personal Development is a chance for you to explore a new interest or work to improve your skills in an existing hobby.

MEASURABLE & CHALLENGING

Your goal should be measurable and personally challenging. You may continue an activity that you have participated in in the past, but be sure that your goal challenges you to develop or improve your skills in that activity rather than a continuation of what you are already doing.

NO SCHOOL/CLASS CREDIT

You may not count any activities that garner school or class credit. Improving your skills in a particular subject or studying for a standardized test may be used, however, your activities must occur outside of school and not be a requirement or assignment for any class. For example, your Personal Development activities could include extracurricular tutoring in which you are not receiving class credit or a weekend SAT prep course that is not a requirement or credit for class.

PART-TIME JOBS

If you are a full-time student, taking on a part-time job may be counted.

COMMON ACTIVITIES



Art



Reading



Music



Leadership



Science

Use your imagination and make it personal!



PHYSICAL FITNESS

Improving one's quality of life through participation in fitness activities



MEASURABLE & CHALLENGING

Your goal should present a level of challenge and you should be able to show marked progress. You may continue an activity that you have participated in in the past, but be sure that your goal challenges you to develop or improve your skills. Physical Fitness goals do not need to be strenuous to be challenging. Furthermore, those with disabilities are given special consideration.

SCHOOL FITNESS ACTIVITIES

School sports and team practices are acceptable activities as long as they are completed outside of class time and do not earn school/class credit. Gym classes or physical education during school hours do not qualify.

NON-COMPETITIVE

Goals should be personally challenging and focus on your individual well-being. A goal of becoming a team captain is not an acceptable goal as your success depends on the decisions of others.

MUST BE AN ISOLATED ACTIVITY

Using activity trackers (i.e. Fitbits) may be useful in tracking your activities, however, activities that are part of your daily routine (i.e. walking to class) cannot be counted towards your Physical Fitness goal. Your activities need to take place outside of your daily routine.

COMMON ACTIVITIES



General Exercise



Walking & Running



School or Club Sport



Nutrition

Use your imagination and make it personal!

EXPEDITION

Immersion in an unfamiliar environment or culture



An Expedition should be a new, unique experience. Your trip should require a level of immersion that enables you to leave your comfort zone/daily routine and discover the unfamiliar.

NO 'SIGN-UP AND GO' TRIPS

Your Expedition must be a trip that you plan and lead. Mission trips, conferences, cruises, competitions, workshops, and "sign-up and go" trips may not be used.

ADULT SUPERVISION IS ENCOURAGED

While you should bear most of the responsibility in planning and executing the trip, adult supervisors or parents may help and accompany you.

NO 'NEXT STAGE OF LIFE' TRIPS

Your Expedition should not consist of activities to pursue your next stage in life. This includes visiting or touring prospective colleges or participating in an internship or work-study program.

TRIPS THAT MEET THE DURATION REQUIREMENT OF A HIGHER AWARD LEVEL

If you complete a trip that satisfies the overnight and/or day requirements for a higher level of the award than what you are applying for, you may submit it with a lower-level Record Book. If you are using it again for a higher-level Record Book, you may submit and put "Requirement met in a previous application," keeping in mind that the National Office will not necessarily approve a trip at a higher level without revisions, even if it was approved for a lower level.

MEDAL LEVEL TRIPS REQUIRE CONSECUTIVE DAYS

Medal levels require that the days and nights be consecutive. You cannot combine trips to meet the requirements of the Bronze, Silver, or Gold Medal.

6-8 HOURS PER DAY

You must complete 6-8 hours of immersive activities per day to 'earn' a day towards the requirement.

ONLY SUBMIT ONE TRIP PER RECORD BOOK SUBMISSION

You only need to submit one Expedition with each Record Book submission. For example, if your first Record Book submission is for the Silver Medal, you only need to submit a two-day, one-night trip. You do not need to submit a one-day trip for the Bronze Certificate, a two-day trip for the Silver Certificate, etc.

DETAILED WRITE-UPS ARE EXPECTED

Please ensure that you submit a THOROUGH write-up of your Expedition. The Submittable Record Book includes a list of questions to help guide you. Your submission should not consist of brief bullet points. A good rule of thumb is that the amount of detail written should reflect the amount of time spent doing each activity.

COMMON ACTIVITIES



Camping



Exploring a nearby Town



Traveling



Tour a museum



Review a book or film



Prepare a cultural dish

Use your imagination and make it personal!

GENERAL ELIGIBILITY & REQUIREMENTS

Watch Videos,
Gain Inspiration,
Track & Submit Activity



Getting Started

You may **start at any level** that you choose. You can start with the Bronze Certificate or go straight for the Gold Medal. You can also go level by level or skip levels. Our office recommends that you submit a Record Book at a lower level to ensure that your goals and activities are approved before working towards higher levels.

All of your **activities must occur after your Activity Start Date** (the day that you register).

You must complete your activities **prior to your 24th birthday**. Participants can register for the program at 13 1/2 and are eligible to submit their first record book at 14.

Goal Setting

You must set goals and **complete activities in ALL FOUR program areas** to earn the award. This includes meeting the hour AND month requirements for each program area based on the level of the award you are applying for.

You may set umbrella goals that include similar activities. For example, if your Voluntary Public Service goal is to help youth in your community, your activities to achieve this goal could include tutoring at the local library, assisting youth at the YMCA, and packing lunches at the food bank for local students.

No double dipping! **None of your activities should overlap between program areas.** Activities that you complete towards one program area cannot be counted towards another. For example, Personal Development goals may include fitness activities such as dancing or team sports. However, make sure that none of your Personal Development activities overlap with your Physical Fitness activities.

Any activities that you receive class credit for cannot be counted towards the award.

The National Office cannot pre-approve any goals or activities. Once you have registered and met with your Advisor, we can provide initial feedback and suggestions.

You may **modify or change your goals and activities at each level of the award** after each submission and approval.

CONTINUED **GENERAL ELIGIBILITY & REQUIREMENTS**

Working on Goals

You may collaborate with others while working toward your goals. However, the **activities and hours that are recorded in your Record Book should be ones that you completed as an individual. You must complete at least 1 hour of activity in a month for that month to count.**

Remember, as long as you are taking the steps to work toward your goals and can show improvement, **it is alright if you do not achieve your goals!**

Submitting Your Record Book

You only need to submit your Record Book ONCE. When submitting revisions, please be sure to re-submit your Submittable Record Book. Participants are eligible to submit from ages 14-24.

Please only submit one Record Book at a time and from the same account online. Please do not submit multiple Record Books for multiple award levels at one time, or use different accounts for each submission.

For each Record Book, you are allowed to submit at a maximum of:

- **4 Voluntary Public Service goals**
- **2 Personal Development goals**
- **2 Physical Fitness goals**
- **1 Expedition**

Additionally, you only need to submit one Expedition that meets the minimum day or overnight requirements for the level you are applying for.

Accommodations

If you have any disabilities or require special consideration, please let our office know. The **program is flexible** and we are happy to assist any way we can.

Awards

If you skip award levels, once approved, you will automatically receive all lower levels of the award. For example, if your first Record Book submission is for the Silver Medal, once approved, you will also be approved for the Bronze, Silver, and Gold Certificates and the Bronze Medal.

AVOID COMMON MISTAKES

- ✓ Double check that you are submitting a complete Record Book – including submitted validation forms, all hour totals, and a detailed write-up for your Expedition/Exploration.
- ✓ Ensure that you are submitting accurate and up to date contact/address information at the beginning of your application. This is how you will be contacted regarding your submission and any communications around receiving your awards.

1-Z. Enter the total amount of Voluntary Public Service hours you completed for each month. Only report hours that occur after your Activity Start Date and please round partial hours to the nearest quarter of an hour (e.g., .25, .5, or .75). *

	2020	2021	2022
January		5	3
February		6	1
Hours:	Months:		
15	2		

- ✓ Ensure that all the activities listed within your Record Book occur after your Activity Start Date.
- ✓ Do not submit any activities from previous Record Book submissions. Our office keeps all approved hours from past submissions in your file at the National Office.
- ✓ Do not send your Validators their validation forms until AFTER your activities have been completed.
- ✓ Only send your Advisor's validation form after all other validations have been received. Advisors should make sure all other validations have been completed before approving a participant's Record Book for submission.
- ✓ Use the official Submittable Record Book to submit your activities. We will only review what is recorded in the Record Book. Although not required, you may include supplementary documents like photos, and expanded explanations.
- ✓ Acknowledge that your Advisor and Validators are not family members.
- ✓ Indicate that you have not received class credit for any of your activities.

RECORD BOOK REVIEW PROCESS

The National Office accepts Record Book submissions on a rolling basis. The only deadline is for the Gold Medal Record Book. If you are planning to attend the Gold Medal Ceremony for a particular year, you must submit your Record Book no later than February 1st and all Revisions must be submitted by March 15th of that year.



We only accept Record Books via Submittable. We no longer accept Record Books via mail, fax or email. If there are exceptional situations in which another method may be necessary, email your region's Program Manager before completing the Record Book.

Once you have submitted your complete Record Book, your Program Manager will review your submission. **All lower levels take 4-6 weeks to review. Gold Medal Record Books take 6-8 weeks to review as they pass through a committee.** This timeline does not account for additional revisions.

Our office cannot expedite the review process. If you are hoping to be approved prior to a personal deadline, please ensure that you allow enough time for review and possible revisions.

If our team has questions regarding your submission, we will notify you via Submittable or email.

Once approved, the National Office will email the awardee their approval letter and Digital Certificates. If you've earned a medal, we will either mail it to you directly or notify your member of Congress so they can provide a form of recognition and your award. The way you receive your award will depend on what you request under the question in your Record Book submission.

Once you have submitted your Record Book, you may begin working toward the next level of the award.

REVISIONS

Please address ALL questions posed and information requested by the National Office.

If you add hours or months of activity to your Record Book, you must re-send your Validator and Advisor validation forms to confirm the new activities.

If you do not address all of the notes in the revision or if you provide new information that requires clarification, you may receive additional revision requests.

Revisions are okay! Most participants are asked to clarify or revise some part of their Record Book.

GOLD MEDAL RECORD BOOKS

The February 1st submission and March 15th revision deadlines are postmark, email, and fax dates.

If we do not receive your Record Book or revisions prior to the submission deadlines, your Record Book can still be approved but you will be considered a Gold Medalist for the following year.

Once we receive your Gold Medal Record Book, your Program Manager will review your submission and work with you on any revisions you might have. Once your Program Manager approves your Record Book, it will be passed to the Gold Medal Review Committee. You will be notified directly once you have been approved!

AWARD PRESENTATIONS



Once approved for a Congressional Award Medal, unless you request for your medal to be mailed directly to you, our office will notify your U.S. Representative of your achievement. Every congressional office is different, but your Representative will then arrange for you to receive your award and recognition for your hard work.



LOCAL PRESENTATIONS

If you are selected to receive recognition and the congressional office is able, the congressional office will reach out to you directly to schedule a time to present your medal. Please make sure that you provide the National Office with your most updated contact information.

Please be patient as it does take time (4-6 months) to schedule presentations with members of Congress.

Some members of Congress hold quarterly or annual presentations while others present medals on a rolling basis. Our office does not have any control of the scheduling of presentations.

STATE CEREMONIES

Certain Congressional Districts and states hold regional or statewide ceremonies.

These presentations are coordinated through our office and we will contact you about six weeks before the event takes place.

If you are unable to attend a regional or statewide ceremony, we will mail your medal directly to you.



GOLD MEDAL CEREMONY

Gold Medals are presented at an annual ceremony in Washington, D.C. each summer.

If you are unable to attend the Gold Medal Ceremony, you may choose to have your Gold Medal presented locally or mailed directly to you after the summer ceremony.

If you do not want your medal presented, let our office know and we will send it directly to you. You may include your achievement on your resume and college/scholarship applications once approved.



ADVISORS & VALIDATORS

Your Advisor and Validators should assist you in setting your goals in each program area and identifying appropriate activities for you to achieve those goals. They should monitor your progress in earning The Congressional Award and validate your hours and months once you have completed your activities.

Participants choose their own Advisors and Validators. Parents, relatives, and peers may not serve as Advisors or Validators. Appropriate Advisors and Validators include teachers, coaches, neighbors, club sponsors, etc.

ADVISOR (one per participant)

1. Someone that you are comfortable with and who can help you identify goals and activities.
2. Once you have completed your activities and filled out your Record Book, your Advisor should review it with you. Your Advisor's validation form and comments will certify that you have completed all of the requirements and should be completed after all of your activities are completed for submission.
3. To change your Advisor, include your new Advisor's information on your next Record Book submission.

VALIDATORS (must have a validator for each goal)

1. Once you have completed your hours and months in a particular goal, you should send the Validation form to your Validator to confirm your activities.
2. The Validator should be specific to the goal you are pursuing. For example, a coach may be an appropriate Validator for your Physical Fitness goals while a Volunteer Coordinator would be an appropriate Validator for your Voluntary Public Service goals.
3. If the majority of your activities for a particular goal are completed independently or with your family and you cannot identify a suitable Validator, your Advisor may serve as a Validator for those activities.

FIND A MENTOR



Family Friend



Neighbor



Teacher



Coach

ADVISOR/VALIDATOR CHECKLIST



ADVISORS

- ✓ Review the requirements and guidelines with the participant.
- ✓ Assist the participant in setting goals for each program area that are personally challenging, achievable, measurable, and fulfilling.
- ✓ Help the participant identify appropriate activities and qualified Validators for each goal.
- ✓ Maintain periodic contact with the participant while they work toward their goals.
- ✓ If the participant needs to revise goals, assist in setting new goals and finding activities to achieve them.
- ✓ Upon completing the program requirements, ensure that the participant has completely and accurately filled out their Record Book and has obtained validation forms from each of their Validators.
- ✓ Complete the Advisor Validation form to confirm all of their goals and activities. You will receive this in an email. Remind the participant to make sure their Record Book has been saved at least once prior to submission. They can also download a PDF version of their submission for safekeeping afterward.
- ✓ Assist the participant in addressing any revisions.

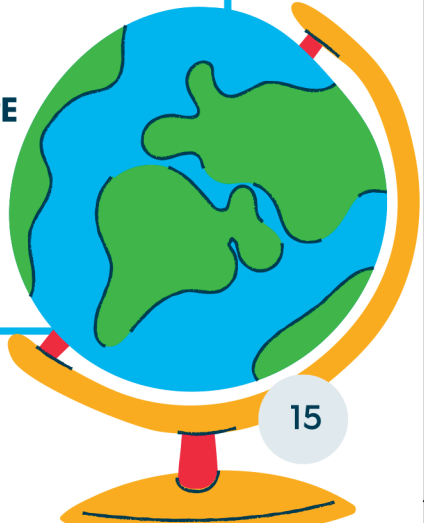
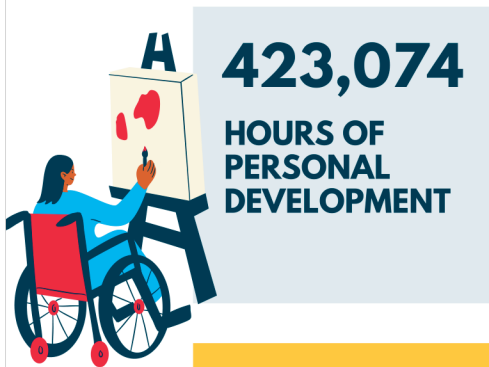


VALIDATORS

- ✓ Review the requirements and guidelines as provided in the Program Book.
- ✓ Discuss the specific requirement for the program area in which you will be working with the participant.
- ✓ Discuss the specific requirement for the program area in which you will be working with the participant.
- ✓ Make certain the participant's goal is personally challenging, achievable, measurable, and fulfilling.
- ✓ Once the participant has met the activity requirements, review the appropriate documentation and complete the Submittable Validator Validation form, you will receive this in an email.

AWARD MISSION IN ACTION

2022





MAKE YOUR IMPACT

CONTACT US



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