THE CONGRESSIONAL AWARD

America's Award for Youth

The Congressional Award

THE AWARD

The Congressional Award is about challenge. It is a fun and interesting way for you to become more involved in something you already enjoy or try something for the first time. After you register to earn the Award, you set goals in four areas; Voluntary Public Service, Personal Development, Physical Fitness and Expedition/Exploration. You must select an Advisor to help you set challenging but achievable goals and assist you in planning activities to reach those goals.

HISTORY

Congress established the Congressional Award in 1979 to recognize initiative, service and achievement in young people. It began as a bipartisan effort in both the United States Senate and the House of Representatives. The original bill was sponsored by the late Senator Malcolm Wallop of Wyoming and the late Congressman James Howard of New Jersey. The enabling legislation (Public Law 96-114) established the Congressional Award as a private public partnership that receives all funding from the private sector. The bill was originally signed into law by President Jimmy Carter. Presidents Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama have signed continuing legislation.

"We expect great things from our Congressional Award participants – in the end they come to expect great things of themselves."
-Dianne Kirkbride
Wyoming Congressional Award Council

COUNCILS

A Congressional Award Council is created through a partnership of volunteers and support from the Congressional Delegation of the state. These Councils work with our National Office to provide youth with increased opportunities in service and personal development. If there is a Congressional Award Council in your area, direct all questions and submit your Record Book there. A list of active Congressional Award Councils can be found at *www.CongressionalAward.org.*

"The Congressional Award provides an opportunity to recognize the hard work and dedication of America's young people who have made the commitment to bettering themselves and their communities."
-Representative Nancy Pelosi (CA12)

America's Award For Youth

Initiative ★ Service ★ Achievement

THE FOUR PROGRAM AREAS

Voluntary Public Service
Providing service to others and the greater community at large.

Personal Development
Developing personal interests, social or employment skills.

Physical Fitness
Improving quality of life and health through fitness activities.

Expedition/Exploration
Undertaking an outdoor, wilderness or venture experience (Historical, cultural or environmental).

You must meet the requirements in all four program areas to qualify for the Award.

"Participating in the Congressional Award program has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. I have truly learned the meaning of being independent, disciplined and organized. I have become very goal-oriented, self-motivated and dedicated to the causes I am passionate about. This is a once-in-a-lifetime experience that I will never forget."

- Stephanie Hu, Congressional Award Gold Medalist
Honolulu, HI

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HOW TO EARN THE CONGRESSIONAL AWARD!

Get started today by registering at *www.congressionalaward.org*. You must register before you may start setting your goals. Hours dedicated to earning an Award at one level are carried to the next level. Along the way to the Gold Medal, you will earn a Bronze, Silver and Gold Certificate and a Bronze and Silver Medal. The minimum age to register is 13 ½ and goals must be achieved by your 24th birthday.

We are delighted that you are taking the Congressional Award challenge! We hope that this is a rewarding experience where you are recognized for expanding your horizons, working to help others and developing new skills. The Program is all about you and what you can accomplish –providing not only the physical medals and certificates, but memories and accomplishments that will last a lifetime.

This Program Book (or Blue Book, as we call it) is your ultimate Congressional Award guide that will provide the guidelines and framework for each Program Area - Voluntary Public Service, Personal Development, Physical Fitness and Expedition/ Exploration. On the last three pages of the Program Book you will find the Record Book, which you will use to record your activities and submit to the National Office in Washington, DC.

You have already taken the first step in the process of earning your Award by registering for the Program. The next step is to set personally challenging goals and work with your adult mentors (your Advisor and Validators) in trying to find activities that will help you meet your goal. Once you feel as though you have met the level you are working towards, fill out the Record Book and send it in for review.

The National Office reviews all Record Book submissions. If our staff has any questions about the submission, we will ask you to submit additional information or revisions. This process is not meant to be tedious, but it is our job to make sure the guidelines were followed and that the requirements were met. If you submit a complete and detailed Record Book and follow the guidelines in the Program Book, you will most likely not have any issues with approval. Once approved, you will receive official notice from our office. If you were approved for any certificates, they will be included in the approval packet. If you received a lower level medal through the approval of a higher level, that medal will be included. If you were approved for a medal, we will work with your Congressional Office in setting up this local presentation. Please take a look at the presentations page (Page 16) to find information about this process. We believe that all participants are working toward earning the Gold Medal and we hope to eventually see everyone at the Gold Medal Ceremony held each summer in Washington, DC!

Here are a few points to note before you get started:

- Hours accumulated prior to your registration cannot count toward the Award.
- In order to be approved for a level, you must meet the requirements for that level in all four Program Areas.
- We cannot and do not pre-approve activities. We can only review a complete Record Book submission and therefore cannot pre-approve activities. If you have questions or would like feedback regarding an activity, you may contact us (information@congressionalaward.org).
- The activities listed in the Program Book are just some of the examples of activities that participants can work on to earn the Award. Do not feel boxed in to just these activities – there is a finite amount of space and infinite possibilities for activities.
- All hours that you earn are cumulative and can be carried over to the next level – therefore, please do not submit previously submitted and approved hours and months of activity – we already have these one file.
- If you plan on using an Exploration or Expedition to carry you through the program, you must submit it at each level for re-review at that level. Higher levels of the Award require a higher degree of challenge and immersion.
- You should never receive school credit for anything you do for the Award (with the exception if you are employed full-time or if your school requires service hours to graduate).
- Months of Activity requirements exist and are important because the Program is challenging you to make a commitment to goals over a minimum amount of time. You need to be able to show progress on the activity for at least one day in order to count the month towards that Program area.
- You may submit for any level of the Award that you believe you have met. We do however recommend that if the Award is a new endeavor for you and your Advisor, you should submit at a lower level just so you can see the process and make sure you're on the right track.
- Your Advisor and Validators are integral in this process – you should be learning from them in their fields of expertise and should go to them if you have questions about a goal or activity.

This is a very personal journey that you have embarked upon and you should use your Record Book submission to demonstrate what you accomplished, what you thought of your experience and what you took away from it. If you are detailed and follow the guidelines in the Program Book, then you should have a smooth review process. You should always work at your own pace, and the only deadline is that you must complete your goals by your 24th birthday. If you would like to be approved for college or job applications, make sure you allow enough time in the case of revisions or longer reviews.

Welcome to the Program and good luck with your quest for the Congressional Award. If you need help, e-mail us at information@congressionalaward.org or call at (888) 80-AWARD. We look forward to seeing what you accomplish!

The Congressional Award

Follow these Steps

SELECT AND WORK WITH AN ADVISOR

Any adult may serve as an Advisor with the exception of your parent, relative, or peer.

Review program guidelines and the Record Book with your chosen Advisor.

Develop Goals with your Advisor's approval.

Select appropriate activities that will help you achieve your goals.

REGISTER FOR THE AWARD

Anyone between the ages of 13 1/2 and 23 may register for the Award.

WORK TOWARDS ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS

The only deadline is your 24th birthday. Work at your own pace.

Remember you may have up to four goals per submission for Voluntary Public Service and two goals per submission for Personal Development and Physical Fitness.

You may start at any level 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. It's your choice.

You must keep records of your activities to show your Advisor and Validators.

After accomplishing your goals for the level you are working towards, have your Validators and Advisors sign off on the completed Record Book pages.

If you have any questions about a goal or activity, you may email information@congressionalaward.org. While we can review your goal, we will NOT approve anything until we receive your actual Record Book.

SUBMIT COMPLETED RECORD BOOK TO THE NATIONAL OFFICE

Contact Information Below

We do not confirm when we receive a submission - please allow at least two weeks to confirm receipt

Make copies of everything you submit. We do not return submissions, so do NOT send anything that you would like back.

Reviewing Record Books can take four to six weeks, not including revisions. Gold Medal Record Books usually take six to eight weeks, not including revisions.

Review time does not include revision turn around time.

REVISIONS

If we have questions regarding your submission, we will notify you in writing regarding clarifications or changes needed to approve your submission.

Follow instructions in the revision letter from the National Office.

If you add any hours or months of activity to your Record Book, you must have a Validator or your Advisor sign off on the additions.

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 requestions.

We will work with you on your Record Book until it can be approved.

This step may not apply to everyone.

APPROVAL

Continue working towards the next level - you may begin working on your next level as soon as you submit your record book.

SUBMIT MATERIALS

MAIL: The Congressional Award
P.O. Box 77440, Washington, DC 20013

EMAIL: information@congressionalaward.org

FAX: (202) 226-0131

Please do not send with signature or confirmation required or via UPS or FedEx

Program Requirements: MEET THE MINIMUMS

There are six levels of the Award-Bronze, Silver and Gold Certificates and Bronze, Silver and Gold Medals. **Each level is cumulative** - time spent on one Award is carried with you to the next level. In our mind, everyone is on their way to the Gold Medal. Any hours submitted at the lower levels carry young people forward to higher levels and create a new baseline for meeting those higher levels. In order to meet the Gold Medal, you must show that you were **actively** working on your goals in all three areas for at least 24 separate months.

	BRONZE CERTIFICATE	SILVER CERTIFIATE	GOLD CERTIFICATE	BRONZE MEDAL	SILVER MEDAL	GOLD MEDAL
VOLUNTARY PUBLIC SERVICE	30 HOURS	60 HOURS	90 HOURS	100 HOURS	200 HOURS	400 HOURS
VOLUNTARY PUBLIC SERVICE MONTHS OF ACTIVITY	N/A	N/A	6 MONTHS	7 MONTHS	12 MONTHS	24 MONTHS
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	15 HOURS	30 HOURS	45 HOURS	50 HOURS	100 HOURS	200 HOURS
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT MONTHS OF ACTIVITY	N/A	N/A	6 MONTHS	7 MONTHS	12 MONTHS	24 MONTHS
PHYSICAL FITNESS	15 HOURS	30 HOURS	45 HOURS	50 HOURS	100 HOURS	200 HOURS
PHYSICAL FITNESS MONTHS OF ACTIVITY	N/A	N/A	6 MONTHS	7 MONTHS	12 MONTHS	24 MONTHS
EXPEDITION/ EXPLORATION	1 DAY	2 DAYS	3 DAYS	1 OVERNIGHT	2 CONSECUTIVE OVERNIGHTS	4 CONSECUTIVE OVERNIGHTS

MONTHS REQUIREMENTS

Along with the hour requirement, the higher levels of the Award require that your activities be spread out over a minimum amount of months. Please note the following:

1. **The month requirement applies to Voluntary Public Service, Personal Development, and Physical Fitness.** You must accumulate the necessary hours over a minimum amount of months in **all three categories**. For example, the Bronze Medal requires that you actively work on your goals and show a **minimum** of seven months of activity in Voluntary Public Service, seven months of activity in Personal Development, and seven months of activity in Physical Fitness respectively.

2. **Only count active months.** For instance, if you register with the Award in January and work on Personal Development in January, February and March and then do not work on any Personal Development until October, November and December that would count as six months of activity. You would not count April through October in your month count on the Record Book page. You should only check off boxes on the record book page if you actually completed an activity towards your goal in that month. Months do not need to be consecutive.

3. **Months are cumulative.** For example, the seven months of activity you complete at the Bronze Medal level will be carried over to the next level, leaving a minimum of five more months of activity needed in order to qualify for the Silver Medal. When you submit for higher levels, **do not re-submit activities** completed and approved at lower levels - we already have these hours and months of activity on file.

4. **Months may only be counted once in the same activity area.** For instance, if you play soccer and softball during the same six month period for your Physical Fitness activity, while you may count the hours garnered in both, you will only get credit for six months of activity, not 12 months of activity. If different goals overlap within one program area in the same month, the month may only be counted once for the respective program area.

Advisors and Validators: WORK WITH MENTORS

Advisors and Validators play an important role in your pursuit of the Congressional Award. To earn the Award, you set goals in four areas: Voluntary Public Service, Personal Development, Physical Fitness and an Expedition or Exploration. Advisors and Validators assist you in the goal setting process and monitor your progress in earning the Congressional Award.

The Congressional Award is an excellent way to increase your mentor base and work with adults who will encourage and support you in earning your Award. You will choose one adult to serve as your Advisor and other adults as your Validators. Y**ou must select adults other than your parents, relatives or peers.**

Select an **ADVISOR** who is qualified to help guide you through the goal setting process. *Teachers, coaches, Scoutmasters, club advisors and civic leaders are examples of potential Congressional Award Advisors.* You will work with your Advisor in setting and achieving your goals and finalizing your completed Record Book.

An appropriate **VALIDATOR** depends upon the activities you select to achieve your goals. *Validators should be knowledgeable or experienced in the activities you pursue in each of the program areas.* For example, if your Physical Fitness goal and activities involve basketball, your basketball coach would be an appropriate Validator. Similarly, if you volunteer at an animal shelter, an employee or the volunteer coordinator of the shelter would be an appropriate Validator. If an appropriate Validator can not be found, and the Advisor is knowledgeable in the specific program area, then the Advisor may serve as the Validator.

The National Office does not match young people with Advisors. We encourage you to reach out into your community to select an adult with whom you feel comfortable working on this endeavor. Participants should work with a minimum of five adults throughout the program, providing an opportunity to learn from mentors who share your enthusiasm, skill and experience. One of the many benefits of the Congressional Award is the opportunity to establish new links within your community which can have a profound influence over time. The Advisor and Validators do more than just sign off on a Record Book. While you may choose to work with someone you know, like a friend's parent, it is encouraged that you seek other options for your Advisor.

"Richard is an outstanding young man! His participation in this program greatly benefited not only himself but all individuals he worked with!"

- Sherri DeNault, Congressional Award Advisor
Wright-Patterson AFB, OH

THE ADVISOR...

1. Reviews the Congressional Award requirements and guidelines provided in the program booklet with you.
2. Helps you set goals that are personally challenging, achievable, worthwhile, measurable, and fulfilling.
3. Approves your goals and ensures that you identify appropriate activities and qualified Validators for each goal.
4. Maintains periodic contact with you while you work towards the Congressional Award.
5. Helps you revise your goals if needed by helping you set new goals and find activities to achieve them.
6. Encourages you to obtain written comments and signatures from your Validators as soon as your goals have been met.
7. Reviews your records and signs the front cover of your Record Book once you have completed your goals in each of the four program areas. **Your Advisor's signature and comments will certify that you have completed all the requirements and should be completed after all activities are completed for the submission.**
8. Retains a photocopy of your Record Book.
9. Works with you to set new goals and begin working on the next level of the Award once you have mailed in the completed Record Book.

THE VALIDATOR...

1. Reviews the Congressional Award requirements and guidelines listed in the booklet with you.
2. Discusses the specific requirements for the particular goal he/she will validate, including how your progress can be measured and documented.
3. Helps you identify your starting level in a particular area of endeavor.
4. Makes certain your goal is personally challenging, achievable, worthwhile, measurable, and fulfilling.
5. Periodically reviews your records that show your progress toward the goal.
6. Reviews all records and signs the appropriate page in the Record Book after you have met minimum hours and duration of activities your goals. **This should be completed AFTER your activities have been completed. It is validating your hours and months of activity.**

Setting Goals

The Congressional Award is based on the concept that, as a participant, you set and achieve challenging yet achievable goals in each of the four program areas. **After registering, you set your goals and have them approved by your Advisor and Validators.** Your goals should demonstrate initiative and forethought. When you complete work on an Award level, you show your Advisor and Validators that you have provided the service you proposed or increased your knowledge and skills in the designated activities.

To help you set goals, ask yourself the following questions:

Does my goal follow the guidelines?
Is my goal...achievable?
...worthwhile?
...measurable?
...challenging?
...fulfilling?

If you answer 'no' to any of these questions, take another look at your goals.

ADDITIONAL GOALS

You may complete the required hours within one program area by working on more than one goal. To do this, you'll set an additional goal in that program area. If you set more than one goal within a program area, you must submit separate Record Book pages for each goal. As you move from one Award level to the next, you can set new goals.

MAXIMUM NUMBER OF GOALS PERMITTED AT EACH SUBMISSION

Voluntary Public Service	4
Personal Development	2
Physical Fitness	2
Expedition/Exploration	1

MAKING CHANGES

Sometimes plans change and you need to re-work your goals. Part of the process of the Award is learning about yourself and what interests you. If you need to drop, add or revise a goal, talk with your Advisor and Validator and make the necessary changes. Once you have re-worked your goal and it has been approved by your Advisor and Validator, begin working toward the revised goal. The time spent on the previous goal, prior to the revision, will still count toward your required hours for the program area.

EXAMPLES OF *ACCEPTABLE* GOALS:

VOLUNTARY PUBLIC SERVICE:

Goal: "I am going to dedicate four hours a week under the direction of St. Vincent de Paul, Inc."

Activities: "I will work in the clothing distribution center and the soup kitchen."

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Goal: "I would like to learn about yoga and progress from a beginning level to an intermediate level by learning at least three new poses a month. I would like to learn stress management and become more flexible and in-tune with my body and mind."

Activities: "I will take a yoga class at a local studio once a week, practice at home and research the difference between the variations of yoga and the different poses."

PHYSICAL FITNESS:

Goal: "I am interested in rowing and would like to row a 2k in 15 minutes."

Activities: "I will practice rowing on a machine three times a week, I will stretch and lift weights and I will join the rowing team."

EXPEDITION:

Goal: "I will take a day trip white water rafting."

Activities: "I will map the route that we will take, plan for my transportation to and from the rafting company, take preparatory safety classes and work on my arm strength by lifting weights."

EXPLORATION:

Goal: "I will plan and prepare a trip to Playa Dominical, Costa Rica to learn about surfing and explore a rainforest environment."

Activities: "I will research flights and hotels to determine my budget, apply for need-based scholarships, and work on small fundraisers. I will then map out the places I want to visit and select a variety of rainforest immersion tours."

EXAMPLES OF *UNACCEPTABLE* GOALS:

VOLUNTARY PUBLIC SERVICE:

"I will be a teacher for our Sunday School program."

Why is this goal unacceptable?

While admirable, your Voluntary Public Service should benefit the community as a whole, not just private organizations. Activities related to internal membership may not be counted toward Voluntary Public Service.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT:

"I will continue to write every morning before school about whatever comes to mind."

Why is this goal unacceptable?

Your goal should challenge you. Continuing an activity will only maintain your ability level. You should set goals that compel you to strive for greatness. Your goal should also make it possible to measure that growth.

PHYSICAL FITNESS:

"I want to be more physically fit."

Why is this goal unacceptable?

Your Physical Fitness goal should be measurable and should include details of what you expect out of your activities. While becoming more physically fit is great to work towards, your goal needs to be specific.

EXPEDITION:

"I will attend or volunteer at a summer camp."

Why is this goal unacceptable?

Attending a summer camp that you did not help organize cannot count as an Expedition activity as others most likely planned the itinerary, meals, etc. In order to qualify for an Expedition, you must show ample planning, preparation and initiative.

EXPLORATION:

"I will visit prospective colleges."

Why is this goal unacceptable?

An Exploration should not consist of a participant adjusting to a new lifestyle such as moving away to attend college, a work-study program, an internship, or pursuing their next stage in life.

Setting Goals (continued)

VOLUNTARY PUBLIC SERVICE

Greater Community at Large

Does your goal illustrate that your service benefits the greater community at large and not just the membership of an insular group?

Activities that serve a select population rather than the greater community at large are generally not accepted as service activities. Although students may be volunteering through a school, if the activity itself is participating in activities such as setting up the classroom, grading papers or working in the administrative office, these services are directly benefitting the school and those students associated with the school as opposed to the community at large. In contrast, services coordinated through a school that reach beyond the students and into the greater community such as park/beach clean-ups, volunteerism through local non-profits, food banks, blood drives, etc. are acceptable Voluntary Public Service activities.

One of the intentions of the Voluntary Public Service program area is to challenge the participant to go beyond their immediate networks and propel themselves into their community and serve a new population that they would have otherwise not have interacted with directly. Volunteering at an organization that the participant themselves is a member and benefits from, would not be appropriate.

No Compensation

Your goal should demonstrate that your service is absolutely voluntary. Your activity should not be a requirement, you should not receive school credit, and you should receive no monetary compensation. Roles like internships (where you garner credit, career advancement) are not appropriate for Voluntary Public Service.

Direct vs. Indirect Service

The bulk of your activity should be a direct service - engaging your community through hands-on service and interaction. No more than 25% of your total hours should be indirect service – training, planning meetings, event preparation.

Active vs. Passive Service

Your Voluntary Service work should mainly include you actively providing a direct service to the greater community at large. An example of this would be if you train service dogs, you can only count hours where you are actively teaching and training the dogs. Simply playing with them or being with them is not service.

Private vs. Public

When volunteering through an organization to complete service activities, the participant should ensure that the organization is a public, not-for-profit organization accessible to all. The organization should not be a private group that serves only a select population or is exclusive to those that pay a fee or have to meet specific requirements.

Some schools and organizations that charge a fee or require tuition such as summer camps, sports programs, colleges and universities, may also provide scholarships, grants, and waivers to underserved populations. In these cases, participants may volunteer at these organizations if he/she can demonstrate that the group is serving a greater population and that everyone has access to these programs.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Skill Development

Your goal should illustrate a particular skill that you're aiming to develop or refine. For instance, if your activity is a part-time job at a book store, your goal should outline the exact skills (inventory, customer service, operating a cash register).

No Class Credit

You may not receive any school/class credit for your Personal Development goal, unless you are employed full time.. It should be purely extracurricular.

PHYSICAL FITNESS

Skill Development

Be sure to set a measurable goal so that you may show marked progress towards the goal. You should focus on a specific skill or skillset within your activity.

No Class Credit

You may not receive any school/class credit for your Physical Fitness goal. It should be purely extracurricular.

EXPEDITION/EXPLORATION

New & Unique

An Expedition/Exploration should be a new, unique experience for you. It should require a level of challenge that enables you to step outside of your daily routine, leave your comfort zone, and immerse yourself into a never before experienced environment.

Nature OR Culture

Your goal should provide the reasoning and context for your trip. Why did you choose this location? What did you aim to learn by the conclusion of the trip? Your goal should detail why your trip is either an Expedition OR an Exploration. Note that an Expedition is more of an outdoor excursion that likely entails a physical challenge in the great outdoors. An Exploration is an immersive experience that takes you to a place of historical, educational, or cultural significance.

Voluntary Public Service

SAMPLE ACTIVITY IDEAS

- AmeriCorps NCCC
- Animal Care Shelter Work
- Aquatics/Water Safety Instructor
- Boys & Girls Clubs Volunteer
- Conservation Projects
- Crime Prevention
- Disabled Citizen Assistance
- Fire Dept. or Police Volunteer
- First Aid Instructor
- Health Service
- Hospital Volunteer
- Immigrant Services
- Interpreter
- Library Work
- Meals on Wheels
- Nursing Home/Aid to Elderly
- Park Volunteer
- Public Housing Services
- Red Cross Volunteer
- Safety Escort for Young Children
- Tutoring within the Community
- United Way Volunteer
- VISTA Program
- YMCA Volunteer

If you would like to have a specific activity reviewed by a Program Manager, email *information@congressionalaward.org*. We can offer feedback but will not pre-approve activities.

"I encourage our youth to become more involved in their communities through service and meaningful activities that will teach them to appreciate the world in which they live and to make additional contributions throughout their lives."
- *Senator Johnny Isakson (GA)*

Sharing your time and talents for the benefit of others is an important part of the Congressional Award program. This requires sensitivity, perception of need, determination, perseverance and dedication. Voluntary Public Service activities must be performed without pay, compensation or school credit. Service provided to fulfill graduation requirements may be allowed. You should provide a **direct service**, rather than focus on issues. You should demonstrate active versus passive work - how are you helping the greater community at large? When setting your goals, identify activities that benefit the greater **community at large**. You may submit a maximum of four different goals per submission for volunteer service.

GUIDELINES

1. ***UMBRELLA GOALS*** Similar activities may be combined to achieve one goal. Collections of unrelated volunteer service activities under one goal would not be acceptable. **If you are planning on completing different activities in order to meet one final goal, please make sure the activities have an underlying connection or similarity that helps achieve your Umbrella Goal.**

   - ***Acceptable*** *goal with a series of activities:*
     "I will provide a minimum of 100 hours of service under the direction of the Volunteer Office of Southern Illinois where I will work on food drives, clothing drives, provide resources to community events, etc." (A similar situation may be applied to service clubs, scouting programs, American Red Cross, etc.)

   - ***Unacceptable*** *Voluntary Public Service submission with no clear goal:*
     "I will volunteer at Habitat for Humanity for a day, the local SPCA for a week, I will tutor elementary students some afternoons, I will work with my Boy Scout Troop in leading training seminars, I will work at an elderly home for an afternoon, etc." (While all of these activities are commendable and may count towards Voluntary Public Service, they do not focus on **one defined goal**. These should be separated to multiple goals.)

2. ***SPREAD OUT YOUR HOURS*** In pursuit of your Award, if your volunteer activity requires you to spend several consecutive days logging many hours in a short period of time (such as serving as a counselor at a camp), plan a follow-up activity in order to meet your months requirement. Keep in mind for activities that last several days, you may only accumulate eight hours per day. You may also continue other volunteer activities throughout the remainder of your Voluntary Public Service requirements.

3. ***GREATER COMMUNITY AT LARGE*** In order to qualify under Voluntary Public Service, activities coordinated by a church, synagogue, mosque, religious institutions or the like, must provide service to the **greater community at large**. Responsibilities related to membership in a religious institution (churches, synagogues, schools, etc.) are not acceptable forms of Voluntary Public Service, but may be acceptable as Personal Development. Public service work completed with religious institutions MUST NOT include any religious instruction or proselytizing and must be open to and serving the general public.

Voluntary Public Service (continued)

- *Acceptable Voluntary Public Service activities accomplished with religious institutions:*
  - Assisting with food and clothing drives
  - Working at soup kitchens
  - Constructing facilities for other communities, building playgrounds and sidewalks, etc.
- *Unacceptable Voluntary Public Service activities accomplished with religious institutions:*
  - Singing in the church choir
  - Participating in religious education
  - Babysitting in the church nursery
  - Teaching Sunday School or Vacation Bible School
  - Proselytizing or teaching your faith

4. ***DIRECT SERVICE*** Activities pursued as a member of an organization, school, or service club such as 4-H, Boy Scouts, Girls Scouts, KEY Club, fraternities, sororities, etc., must provide a direct service to the greater community at large. Work related to internal membership activities (such as recruitment, training or initiation) does not qualify for Voluntary Public Service.

5. ***PRIVATE vs. PUBLIC*** Volunteering at private businesses or entities does not qualify for Voluntary Public Service. You may not volunteer to work at a private office, such as a law firm, doctor's office, sports camps, or a private dance studio as these activities do not benefit the greater community at large. These activities may however be acceptable for Personal Development.

6. ***NON-PARTISAN*** Voluntary Public Service must be non-partisan. You may not work for an elected official, promote a political issue or volunteer on a political campaign for Voluntary Public Service. This includes volunteering for entities with a partisan or issue based focus.

7. ***PLANNING/TRAINING HOURS*** Planning and training hours for Voluntary Public Service work for the Congressional Award must consist of less than 25% of the total hours completed. For example, participants that serve as a lifeguard for Voluntary Public Service should count only 25% of their hours toward training classes, etc. While we understand large projects and initiatives take a lot of time and energy, you must be able to show that a majority of your service hours provide a direct service to the greater community. All other hours must consist of a direct service.

8. ***FUNDRAISING*** If you would like to raise money or collect materials for Voluntary Public Service, no more than 25% of your fundraising efforts may take place within your home. While fundraising for various health related organizations is a valid cause, the efforts need to take place outside of the home within the community at large.
   - *Acceptable Fundraising Activities for Voluntary Public Service:*

     "I will collect donations for the local Red Cross by calling shops from my home for excess merchandise that they may contribute for disaster relief efforts. I will also volunteer with the local Red Cross at blood drives, assembling school chests and I will serve as a peer educator for volunteer training sessions."

9. ***ONLY COUNT ONCE*** Opportunities for Voluntary Public Service are abundant in our communities and across the nation. **Service hours accumulated during an Expedition/Exploration cannot be counted toward the Award for Voluntary Public Service.** Your Expedition/Exploration is a onetime experience from start to finish. Every moment of your trip is dedicated to fulfilling your Expedition/Exploration goal. We fully encourage each participant to serve as they travel and gather new experiences, but hours from this service may not be counted toward your Award for Voluntary Public Service.

10. If you volunteer during the school day (during a free period or the like) your Voluntary Public Service activity must serve and benefit the greater community at large. If these activities only benefit a private community, they would be better suited under Personal Development.

VOLUNTARY PUBLIC SERVICE	BRONZE CERTIFICATE	SILVER CERTIFIATE	GOLD CERTIFICATE	BRONZE MEDAL	SILVER MEDAL	GOLD MEDAL
TOTAL HOURS NEEDED	30	60	90	100	200	400
TOTAL MONTHS NEEDED	N/A	N/A	6 MONTHS OF ACTIVITY	7 MONTHS OF ACTIVITY	12 MONTHS OF ACTIVITY	24 MONTHS OF ACTIVITY

Personal Development

SAMPLE ACTIVITY IDEAS

- Agriculture/Farming
- Amateur Radio
- Arts and Crafts
- Astronomy
- Automotive Science
- Career Development Programs
- Clerical and Office
- Collecting (stamps, coins, etc.)
- Coding or Computer Science
- Conservation/Environment
- Construction
- Creative Writing
- Cross Cultural Programs
- Dancing
- Dog Training
- Fashion Design/Tailoring
- Gardening
- Horsemanship
- Job Training Programs
- Language Study
- Leadership Training
- Literacy Programs
- Magic
- Model Building
- Music/Singing
- National Guard
- Part-Time Work
- Photography
- Religious Study/Teaching
- Speech and Debate
- Sewing/Quilting
- Theater/Acting
- Venturing
- Video Production
- Woodwork

If you would like to have a specific activity reviewed by a Program Manager, email *information@congressionalaward.org*. We can offer feedback but will not pre-approve activities.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	BRONZE CERTIFICATE	SILVER CERTIFIATE	GOLD CERTIFICATE
TOTAL HOURS NEEDED	15	30	45
TOTAL MONTHS NEEDED	N/A	N/A	6 MONTHS OF ACTIVITY

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	BRONZE MEDAL	SILVER MEDAL	GOLD MEDAL
TOTAL HOURS NEEDED	50	100	200
TOTAL MONTHS NEEDED	7 MONTHS OF ACTIVITY	12 MONTHS OF ACTIVITY	24 MONTHS OF ACTIVITY

Expand your horizons while developing individual interests, social and life skills. The Congressional Award challenges you to pursue a new interest or advance to a higher level in an ongoing interest through Personal Development activities. **This is your opportunity to explore an activity that you are interested in and really make the program about you! You cannot receive class credit for your Personal Development activites** (note exception 3 below). Please remember that you may submit a maximum of two different goals per submission for Personal Development.

GUIDELINES

1. ***SKILL & IMPROVEMENT*** Your Record Book should include a goal which identifies a definite task to be completed and activities which require the application of specific skills. Your Record Book should show an intended improvement level in a particular skill or hobby. The Personal Development goal should reflect a strengthening of your skill in a specific area. If you do not have a way to measure your progress, include extra activities.
   - *Acceptable goal:*
     "I will improve my acting skills and learn more about working behind the scenes in a theater."
   - *Acceptable activities in meeting your goal:*
     "I will perform in community theatre, work as a stage hand and learn about lighting, props and costumes."
2. ***PART TIME JOB*** If you are a full-time student, a part-time job may count for Personal Development. In order to qualify, the goal must indicate the development of vocational and/or work skills and the **activities must be performed without school credit.**
   - *Acceptable Part-time work pursued by a full-time student as Personal Development:*
     "I will work part-time at a bank where my duties will include: answering telephones, filing, word processing and operating photocopiers and fax machines. This will allow me to explore careers in banking while still being in school full-time."
3. ***BACK TO SCHOOL*** If you are employed full-time, educational activities may serve as a Personal Development activity. In order to qualify, you must indicate your employment status on the cover sheet of your Record Book. **Activities completed at the employment site may not count towards the Award.**
   - *Acceptable Education pursued as Personal Development by a person employed full-time:*
     "I will attend classes to prepare for and take the exam for a General Education Diploma. In addition, I will explore jobs that I will be qualified for at a hospital and practice writing letters to apply for those jobs."
4. ***GROUP WORK*** Your Personal Development goal can be pursued either individually or as part of a group. If your goal is within a group activity, your individual contribution to the planning, execution, and completion of the activity is the basis for assessment. Your individual progress should be measured against your goal, not other teammates. Everything should be submitted in your own words!
   - *Acceptable Personal Development goal as part of a group:*
     "I will pursue my interest in photography as a member of the school newspaper staff. I intend to produce at least ten photos, which will be published during the next school year."
5. ***SPREAD OUT YOUR HOURS*** Please note that you should only count up to eight hours a day toward Personal Development. Please do not count more than eight hours a day, even if you are serving as a camp counselor.

Physical Fitness

SAMPLE ACTIVITY IDEAS

- Aerobics
- Badminton
- Baseball
- Basketball
- Bicycling
- Boxing
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Dancing
- Equestrian
- Fencing
- Field Events
- Figure Skating
- Fitness Walking
- Football
- Golf
- Gymnastics
- Hiking
- Hockey
- Marching Band
- Martial Arts
- Personal Workout
- Pilates
- Racquetball
- Rafting/Rowing
- Rollerblading
- Rugby
- Running or Jogging
- Sailing
- SCUBA Diving
- Skateboarding
- Skiing
- Spinning
- Soccer
- Tennis
- Volleyball
- Weight training
- Wrestling
- Yoga

If you would like to have a specific activity reviewed by a Program Manager, email *information@congressionalaward.org*. We can offer feedback but will not pre-approve activities.

Improve your quality of life through participation in fitness activities. The Congressional Award challenges you to set and achieve a measurable Physical Fitness goal. Your goal can involve an activity that you have never attempted before or it can be a continuation of an activity that you have experienced before but at a higher level. Both team sports and individual activities are acceptable as long as the activities lead to an improved performance or greater physical health. Gym class is not acceptable for Physical Fitness. You may submit a maximum of two different goals per submission for Physical Fitness.

GUIDELINES

1. ***COMPETITION*** Your activities for Physical Fitness may be competitive but your goal may not be competitive.
   - *Acceptable Goal with Competitive Activities:*

     Example Goal: "I will improve my basketball skills so that my free-throw percentage will increase from 35 to 40 percent."

     Example Activity: "I will achieve this goal by practicing after school and by playing on the school basketball team."

     Unacceptable Goal: "I will become the captain of the basketball team." (Becoming captain of the team depends on the decisions of others.)

2. ***MEASURABLE*** Include relevant Physical Fitness statistics to ensure that a **challenging, objective goal** can be achieved such as: experience level, heart rate, respiration, specific skills, times and distances, barbell weight, batting averages, etc.

   Example Activity: "I will decrease my mile time from eleven minutes to ten minutes by running after school and joining the track team."

3. ***IMPROVEMENT*** Include your **current fitness level** or sport skill and specify how much you plan to improve while working toward the Congressional Award.

   Example Goal: "I can presently jog five miles in 50 minutes and I intend to improve my time to 8.5 minutes per mile."

   Example Goal: "Through my aerobics program, I will improve my resting heart rate from 90 to 75 and lose ten pounds within 15 months."

4. ***PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES*** Physical Fitness goals for persons with disabilities are given special consideration. Often an appropriate activity can be identified with the help of a physician. Remember, a fitness activity does not have to be strenuous in order to be challenging.

5. ***CLASS CREDIT*** Physical Fitness activities completed for a grade or graduation cannot be counted towards the Congressional Award. Extracurricular activities can be counted towards the Congressional Award.

PHYSICAL FITNESS	BRONZE CERTIFICATE	SILVER CERTIFIATE	GOLD CERTIFICATE	BRONZE MEDAL	SILVER MEDAL	GOLD MEDAL
TOTAL HOURS NEEDED	15	30	45	50	100	200
TOTAL MONTHS NEEDED	N/A	N/A	6 MONTHS OF ACTIVITY	7 MONTHS OF ACTIVITY	12 MONTHS OF ACTIVITY	24 MONTHS OF ACTIVITY

Expedition or Exploration

SAMPLE ACTIVITY IDEAS

EXPEDITION IDEAS:

Bicycle Tour
Camping
Canoe Trip
Horseback Endurance Ride
Mountain Climbing
Wilderness Hiking

EXPLORATION IDEAS:

Visit a State or National Historical Site
Stay with a Family of a Different Culture or Religion
Live the Life of a Ranch Hand for Cattle Round-Up
Take part in a Reenactment
Visit a city or town to learn about a historical event or time

Submissions Need to Detail Challenge Level, Immersion, and Planning Expeditions and Explorations will not be reviewed over the phone. If you have a specific question regarding a specific activity, please email

information@congressionalaward.org

detailing your activity.
Goals will not be pre-approved.

Challenge yourself with a wilderness adventure or by fully immersing yourself in an unfamiliar culture or environment. The Congressional Award allows you to choose between an Expedition and an Exploration.

The aim of your Expedition or Exploration should be to develop a spirit of adventure and discovery. Organizing, planning, training and completing the Expedition or Exploration requires *self-reliance, determination and cooperation.*

The Expedition or Exploration is a **one-time experience** that you plan and execute. **It is not an event you attend that someone else has planned.** Sign up and go activities such as jamborees, conferences, sport and summer camps, leadership workshops, cruises, college visits, Mission Trips, competitions, retreats and orientations are **not** appropriate for the Congressional Award Expedition or Exploration. You should learn to be responsible for yourself while learning more about our world through first-hand experience in the wilderness or in a new and different culture. You should not be primarily sitting in a conference room or hotel ballroom.

Activities completed on your Expedition or Exploration may only be counted in the Expedition or Exploration category of the Award. Activities completed on your Expedition or Exploration cannot be counted toward Voluntary Public Service, Personal Development or Physical Fitness and may not be completed for class credit.

Many activities are acceptable for the Expedition or Exploration; remember your activity must involve a significant amount of independent planning and initiative on your part. Your write up should include this information as well as challenges you faced and everything should be in your own words. If you cannot fully detail the questions in the Record Book, you may want to change or expand your activity.

GUIDELINES

Expeditions are typically outdoor excursions that include camping, hiking, and wilderness or outdoor activities. This activity usually compels you to forgo the comforts of home and learn to pack and prepare equipment, set up a tent, and cook food without modern conveniences. You may choose to incorporate a scientific study into your Expedition like completing a wildlife survey while on a backpacking trip in a National Park or searching for signs of prehistoric life in a remote area.

Explorations are trips that provide you with a new cultural experience. These may include living on a farm, traveling to a foreign country, visiting a historical site or exploring a new environment. Explorations involve preliminary research and preparation. Challenges may include language barriers, traveling great distances, or learning new skills.

1. ***CHALLENGE*** **When planning an Expedition or Exploration take into account the level of challenge expected of the Award requirements.** Higher levels of the Award will require a higher level of challenge. This includes more logistics you must coordinate and are in charge of, a higher level of immersion, etc. What is personally challenging for a young man who enters the program having already earned the Eagle rank in Boy Scouts will be remarkably different from a young man from the inner city who has never left his neighborhood. The consideration of what is personally challenging is always important. If your activity is something you have already done or do regularly with no added challenges, then it will probably not be accepted.
2. ***COST*** **Expeditions and Explorations are neither designed nor intended to be expensive.** Should you find your Expedition is costly, investigate options. You can work with others to secure camping equipment, instead of purchasing tents, sleeping bags, etc. Some Explorations can be more expensive. This is something you must consider if you choose this type of activity. You may wish to explore sponsorship or scholarships.
3. ***SUPERVISION*** Although you are to be self-supporting and self-sufficient, **an adult supervisor may oversee the venture.** The adult supervisor may observe the activities, but you are responsible for carrying out the Expedition or Exploration.
4. ***DURATION OF ACTIVITY*** You must be able to show at least 6-8 hours of Immersion activities in order to count the activity as a day Expedition/Exploration. This must be detailed in your write up.

Expedition or Exploration (continued)

5. ***GOLD MEDAL LEVEL*** If you have the opportunity to complete a Gold Medal Expedition/Exploration while working on earlier Award level requirements you are allowed to proceed with the Gold Medal level Expedition/Exploration activity. Completing the Gold Medal level Expedition/Exploration requirements may be credited to lower Award levels. However, three rules apply:
   1. You must submit a Record Book write-up of the Expedition/Exploration **at each level**; otherwise your Record Book is incomplete.
   2. The National Office can request additional information at any level, even if the Expedition/Exploration has been approved at a lower level.
   3. Since higher levels of the Award require a more challenging Expedition/Exploration, the National Office will not necessarily approve an activity at a higher level, even if it was acceptable at the lower level. You must fully detail the challenge of your activity at each level; remember we can only review what you submit. Be as detailed and descriptive as possible from the start.

GUIDELINES FOR AN EXPEDITION

Example Goal: "I will plan a four consecutive night camping trip on the Appalachian Trail where I will hike fifteen miles a day and will compare and contrast the foliage of the surrounding trees on each leg of my hike."

Example Activities: "I will plan for my four-night camping trip by coordinating my travel arrangements and meals, mapping the trail, packing, researching the area and training to carry a large backpack."

- ***GROUP*** Although it is not required participants often coordinate with a team to plan, train for, and undertake a wilderness activity. This usually involves a hike, canoe trip, long-distance cycling, cross-country skiing, or something of a similar nature. Be sure to detail **your** initiative and **your** contributions in your write up. If you complete with a sibling or a friend, you must submit separate write ups.
- ***SUPERVISION*** The Congressional Award encourages adult supervision during the event. Your Advisor or Validator does not necessarily need to accompany you on your trip, but they should be aware of all your plans for Record Book purposes. Sharing photographs, journals, or timesheets with your Advisor and Validator is **required**.
- ***PREPARATION*** The Expedition may, by its nature, involve uncertain circumstances such as weather or terrain. You or your group have the responsibility to be properly trained and to work with a qualified adult in preparing for the Expedition.

GUIDELINES FOR AN EXPLORATION

Example Goal: "I will travel from Centreville, Pennsylvania to New York City to explore different types of architecture and study my own heritage."

Example Activities: "I will use public transportation to visit Little Italy, Chinatown and Ellis Island. I will plan and prepare for my Exploration by coordinating my travel and researching the different cultures. I will also find information about my family at Ellis Island to complete a study on my own heritage."

- ***CHALLENGE*** While family vacations are fun and relaxing there must be a level of challenge and discovery involved with any trip to count as an Exploration. Please show ample planning, along with a real immersion in a different culture where you are asked to think on your feet. Vacations planned by others with limited time spent learning about different societies will not be accepted for an Exploration goal. You must show at least four days of actual immersion for the Gold Medal level.
- ***IMMERSION/LEARNING*** If you choose an Exploration you should plan a trip that includes some sort of study or actual "Exploration" project. For example, visiting the Florida Keys works well for an Exploration as long as you can show that you immersed yourself in a new surrounding, were self-sufficient and gained from the experience. You should plan on discussing how your activity was unlike anything you had ever experienced by researching the new environment. Sample activities would include comparing and contrasting the architecture or ecosystem between two cities/states/regions. Training may be required.
- ***EVERYDAY vs. NEW EXPERIENCE*** While moving to a new place is always a challenge - handling logistics, meeting new people, packing, etc. - an Exploration need to be a one-time experience that involves it's own purpose. An Exploration should not consist of adjusting to a new lifestyle such as moving away to attend college, a work-study program, an internship, trips to pursue knowledge in a career interest, or pursuing your next stage in life.

EXPEDITION OR EXPLORATION	BRONZE CERTIFICATE	SILVER CERTIFIATE	GOLD CERTIFICATE	BRONZE MEDAL	SILVER MEDAL	GOLD MEDAL
NEEDED	1 DAY	2 DAYS	3 DAYS	1 OVERNIGHT (2 DAYS/1 NIGHT)	2 CONSECUTIVE OVERNIGHTS (3 DAYS/2 NIGHTS)	4 CONSECUTIVE OVERNIGHTS (5 DAYS/4 NIGHTS)

Frequently Asked Questions

STARTING THE PROGRAM

Can the work I completed before I registered count towards the Award?
No. Hours completed before you register for the Congressional Award cannot be counted toward the Award. However, once you register and your goals are approved by your Advisor, hours can be counted and carried to each level of the program.

When can I begin counting hours?
You may begin counting hours once you have submitted your Registration Form and your goals have been approved by your Advisor. Your Activity Start Date is included in your registration letter.

What if I want to go straight for a Higher Level (i.e. Silver Medal)?
You may begin with any level that you choose. We consider every participant to be on the road to the Gold Medal, you will receive everything you earn along the way. Simply submit a Congressional Award Record Book for the level that you'd like to pursue once you fulfill those requirements (please do not submit multiple record books at one time and do not submit Record Books piecemeal). We recommend that you start at one of the lower levels. If you submit at a lower level, you can be sure that you understand the program requirements and review process.

What is an Advisor?
An Advisor serves as a coach or mentor, guiding you through the program. The Advisor **cannot** be your parent, relative or peer. Advisors oversee your efforts in the program and should sign off on the completed record book after all activities have been completed and validated.

What is a Validator?
Validators attest to specific work completed. For instance, if you volunteer with Habitat for Humanity, the Validator might be a site supervisor. Your Validator **cannot** be your parent, relative or peer. The Validator should sign off on the record book page when the activities on the page have been completed.

Can I change my Advisor?
Yes, just note the change of Advisor on your next Record Book submission.

What does *Spreading Out Your Hours* mean?
When we ask you to *Spread Out Your Hours*, we are asking you to show activity in each of the three main program areas (Voluntary Public Service, Personal Development and Physical Fitness) over a **minimum** amount of months. In order to count a month of activity, you should have logged at least one hour toward that activity in that month. The program is a marathon, not a sprint to reach your goals. Keep in mind these are only minimums; you should take as long as you need (you have until the age of 24 to complete your goals). The first two levels, Bronze and Silver Certificates, have no minimum month requirement. The levels that have minimum month requirements are:

Gold Certificate - 6 months of activity
Bronze Medal - 7 months of activity
Silver Medal - 12 months of activity
Gold Medal - 24 months of activity

For more information on the month requirements, see page four.

Frequently Asked Questions (continued)

Can the National Office Pre-Approve my Goals and Activities?
No, the National Office does not pre-approve goals as activities may change and what is stated in a brief email for review may be completely different from the actual submission. The approval of a Record Book is based solely on what is submitted in the Record Book. The National Office can give feedback on goals or activities, just send an email detailing your plans to your appropriate Regional Program Manager for assistance.

WORKING ON YOUR GOALS

I've completed the requirements for one of the program areas, can I submit those activities?
No, please only submit complete Record Books. You must meet the requirements in each of the four program areas for the level you are applying for. Incomplete Record Books will not be reviewed.

Can activities with other organizations count towards the Award?
Yes, you may work with another organization as long as you can show **your** work and **your** activities in striving to reach your Congressional Award goals.

Can time spent at regular club meetings count towards the Award?
Club meetings related to internal membership may not be counted toward the Award. Activities within club meetings should further your goals. Please show that you were either planning an activity or working on an activity during the meeting time.

Can I complete activities with other people? How would I submit a group activity?
Yes, you may work within a group in any of the program areas. When working with a group, please note your individual contribution within the group activity to show **your** progress and **your** effort. Your submission must be in your own words!

Can I complete a Fitness activity for Personal Development?
Yes, you may complete a physical activity like dance or soccer for Personal Development as long as it has not already been counted towards Physical Fitness. Activities may only be counted towards the Award once.

RECORD BOOK SUBMISSION & REVIEW PROCESS

When is my Record Book due?
Record Books are accepted all year. There are no deadlines. Just make sure you achieve your goals by your 24th birthday. Those wishing to participate in the National Gold Medal Ceremony held every summer in Washington, DC, must submit their Gold Medal Record Book no later than February 1st of that year. Otherwise, they will be included in the following year's Gold Medal Ceremony. Medalists who are approved after this deadline are still Gold Medalists, they just are not recognized until the following Ceremony.

How do I know if my Record Book is complete?
Your Record Book is complete only after **you have achieved your goals in each of the four program areas** and accumulated the **required months and hours** for the Award level. Once the Record Book is filled out properly and all necessary signatures have been obtained, submit all records of your achievements to the National Office or respective council.

Can submissions be returned to me?
No, we do not return Record Books or supporting materials, please do not send anything that you would like returned.

How long does the review process take?
It may take several weeks for the initial review of your Record Book. Please be patient. Participants should hear from their Program Manager within four - six weeks (not including revision or clarification requests). The Gold Medal Record Books take about six - eight weeks to process (not including revision or clarification requests). If you would like to check on the review status of a Record Book, E-mail information@ Congressionalaward.org with your name, city and state, level you are applying for and the date you sent in your Record Book, and we will check on the status of your paperwork. If you have a deadline for college applications, please keep these timelines in mind.

What if I need to send in revisions or clarifications? What is the process?
If we have any questions, we will send a revision or clarification request letter. Complete the requested revisions that are outlined in the letter you receive from the National Office. After you have made the necessary alterations or addressed any questions, send the updated information to the National Office. If you add activities (hours and months) you will need your Validator (or Advisor) to approve the new hours and months of activity.

PRESENTATIONS AND MOVING FORWARD

When will my Medal be presented?
Once you are approved for a Congressional Award Medal, we will notify your Congressional Office. The Congressional Office will then contact you regarding the presentation. Please be patient as it does take time to get onto the schedule of a Member of Congress. While some Members present as medals are approved, others like to host an annual presentation. Gold Medals are presented annually in Washington, DC. If you are unable to attend the Washington, DC Ceremony, we will work with your Member of Congress to set up a local presentation.

How are Certificates presented?
You will receive Certificates with your approval letter in the mail.

Should I re-submit hours and activities that I already sent in?
No, hours are cumulative in the Award. Any hours you submit to us through Record Books are filed with your ongoing program applications. Do **NOT** re-submit hours from an activity that you have already submitted.

Do I submit a new Record Book at each Award level?
Yes, each level of the Award you choose to apply for will require a new Record Book. Each Record Book must contain details of your works in each activity area and the signed Record Book Cover Page.

I recently moved. How do I update my contact information?
In order to update contact information, please just note the change in your next Record Book submission. We will update our system when we receive your change. If you move between the time that you were approved for a Medal and the actual presentation of the Medal, please email your updated contact information to *information@congressionalaward.org*.

If you have additional questions, visit www.congressionalaward.org for more information.

Presentations and Notification

Once we review and approve your record book, we will notify you via mail of this approval. If you earned certificates, they will be included in the mailing. If you applied for and were approved for a higher level, any lower levels that you earned through the approval will be included in the approval packet. Medals are presented by Members of Congress. Please see below regarding the presentation for medals:

When do presentations take place?

That depends. We notify each Congressional Office on a frequent basis regarding recent approvals in their districts. Some Congressional Offices make presentations as frequently as we approve Medalists while others ask that we hold their Medalists for an annual presentation. These presentations can take time to schedule – even if your Member's Office gets right back to us. On average, presentations take about four to six months to schedule, although again, this all depends on the Members Office. If you would like a status update on a presentation after this time period, please contact us.

Gold Medals are presented annually in Washington, DC. We hold all Gold Medal presentations for a given year until after that ceremony. This way we give you the first option of being presented in Washington, DC. If you are unable to attend the Washington, DC events, then you may request a local presentation, following the notes above.

How will I be notified about a presentation?

Once a Members office contacts us, we coordinate the medal shipment along with other materials they may need for the presentation. We then recommend that they reach out directly to you all as you understand your schedule better than we do. We do provide the Members Office with the most updated contact information (address, phone and email). If you move or change this information, please let us know so the office can reach out.

IF you reside in a region or district that hosts a larger presentation, you will be notified on average about six weeks before the presentation. This will include RSVP information. If you are unable to make the planned large event, please let us know how you would like your Medal presented (i.e. holding until the following year/ presentation or we can mail the medal to you).

What will the presentation be like?

This also varies. Each Congressional Office is different. While some invite all Medalists into their District Office for a meet and greet, others will hold individual events in the District Office. Some even add a medal presentation to an already established school visit or appearance at a community event (like a town hall or civic meeting).

How should I dress for my presentation?

We recommend business attire for presentations. This may be similar to church attire, with suit jacket and nice slacks for boys and a nice dress or skirt and blouse for girls.

What should I talk to my Member about?

Yourself! They want to meet these amazing constituents from their district who are accomplishing great things! Tell them about your activities in earning your Award, what you hope to accomplish next, what you plan to do in the future. Maybe you have a specific issue that's important to you, like the local community center budget or education policies – now is the time to broach the topic with a civic leader who may be able to provide guidance. Networking and talking to someone elected to represent you is a great learning experience. If you disagree with your Member on an issue, please remember to always stay civil and still thank them for taking the time to meet with you. Remember, Members have very busy schedules with legislative work in Washington, DC and then constituent work in the District. We want to always thank them for their time and support.

Can I take pictures?

Please do! Most offices will also take snapshots for social media and press releases, but you are more than welcome to take home your own memento. If you have a great picture, remember we're on social media (Twitter: @theAward, Facebook: The Congressional Award, Instagram: TheCongressionalAward) and would love to highlight your presentation! You can even use the hashtag #EarnedIt.

Can I include my approval on applications, even if my medal has not been presented?

Yes, once you are approved, you are technically a Congressional Award Medalist. Even if it takes some time for the presentation, you may list your achievements on college applications, scholarships, etc.

NOTIFY YOUR SCHOOL

If you would like for us to notify your school of your achievement at the medal level, we will gladly do so when approved. In order to do so, please fill out the form below and submit the completed form with your record book. We can only complete this step for Medalists and we will only contact one representative on your behalf.

Your Name: _____

Level Applying: _____

School Name: _____

School District: _____

School Street: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Contact (Principal, Counselor, Dean, etc): _____

_____

Title: _____

Email Address: _____

Filling Out the Record Book

PROGRAM AREA ACTIVITY PAGES

Each Program Area Record Book page is broken up into two sections – Essay Questions and Logistic Information about your activities. You must submit the logistic information as requested on the record book pages. If you would like to complete the essay answers on a typed document or supplemental pages, you may do so, but please include a brief description of your goals and activities on the signed record book page. The Validator signature on each page validates that the hours, months of activity and activities were completed as stated. If you do not include parts or any of this information on validated pages, then your submission is not complete. Please keep the following in mind when completing your record book – while you do not need to address each question, they should help you in describing your activities and how those activities helped you complete your goal. Write ups range from two brief but detailed sentences to a typed page – we only ask that you are detailed and address the questions on the record book page. Also, remember that higher levels of the Award will require more details – while you may be approved for a brief write up at the Bronze Certificate level, at the higher levels like the Gold Medal, we require details and a well thought out response to the questions asked.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Describe Your Goal – What is your ultimate goal? What do you hope to achieve? Your goal should be focused and detailed.

Describe Your Activities – How are you going to get to your goal? What steps are you going to take? Where are you going to volunteer? What resources will you use to hone your skills? What activities are you going to do? How often are you going to work on these activities? If you are completing a variety of activities under a goal, describe the common thread between the activities.

Describe What You Have Learned and How Your Skill Level Has Changed – What have you taken away from this goal and activities? What was your improvement? Did you learn anything new?

How Did You Serve the Greater Community at Large (Voluntary Service Only) – How did you complete a direct service to help others? How did those outside your direct community benefit?

LOGISTIC INFORMATION – The Numbers!

If your goal spanned more than four years, please make a copy of the sheet and add onto the month total. Just as in hours, do not report any activities that have already been submitted. Make sure to fully complete the months and hours information:

The Year - Indicate the year the activities were completed – make sure not to include anything before your Activity Start Date.

The Months – Indicate the number of hours completed towards this goal each month. If you did not complete any hours toward the goal in a month, then you would list zero (0) for that month.

Total Hours – Add up the number of hours you are submitting from this page and list it here. That just helps us find the total. Do not include hours that were submitted at a previous level – only the hours documented on this program area sheet.

Months of Activity (*check all that apply below*) TOTAL **Hours** (*only report **NEW** hours*): _____

YEAR	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC

Validator Information

Your Validator should sign AFTER you have completed all information on the activities page. The Validator signature should not be dated before you complete the activities listed on the page. Your Validator is confirming that the activities and goals were completed as stated with the hours and months of activity completely filled out. If this information is not validated, or if your Validator signs off on the page before the activity hours are completed, then you will receive a revision request. Validation comments are not required, but are helpful for not only the review, but as feedback for you. The Validator is serving as a mentor in this area and validation notes should help you see your accomplishments from a mentor's point of view.

Filling Out the Record Book (continued)

GENERAL NOTES

- Remember to be as detailed as possible in your Record Book. We can only review what is submitted.
- While we appreciate the support of parents, we ask that you take the initiative to complete your Record Book. The Congressional Award is about you taking the challenge to set and complete goals and then submitting the appropriate documentation of these activities in your own words. We need to hear from you about what you achieved and what you learned. If legibility is a concern, electronic Record Book pages are available online at www.congressionalaward.org.
- Maintain documentation of your hours for possible clarification. Appropriate documentation may be timesheets in an Excel Spreadsheet, a journal, a calendar, etc. These may be requested if revisions are needed.
- Make sure you did not count more than eight hours a day for Voluntary Public Service, Personal Development and/or Physical Fitness.
- Do not submit hours or activities that may have already been counted (except for a Gold Medal Level Expedition/ Exploration). We keep your records on file and do not need your previous materials.
- Did you Spread Out Your Hours? Remember, if you are applying for anything above the Silver Certificate, you need to show activity in a ***minimum span of months*** *(see page four for more information)*.
- Make sure to have your Validators and Advisor review your documentation and add comments about your work before they sign off on the completed Record Book pages. They should sign complete sheets (hours and dates of activities should be included) at the end of the goal. If revisions are requested, you may need to get their signatures again.
- If you completed your goals with a group, did you describe your contribution?
- While we appreciate seeing illustrations of your activities through pictures and note-books, we only need the completed Record Book pages.

PROGRAM AREA SPECIFIC NOTES

- **VOLUNTARY PUBLIC SERVICE**
  - Did you accurately describe how the community at large benefited from your activities?
- **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**
  - If you used a part time job as a goal, did you accurately note your current school information? If you used a class, did you accurately note your employment status?
  - If you indicate a class, did you confirm that you did not receive class credit?
- **PHYSICAL FITNESS**
  - Did you include your starting level and your end goal?
  - Did you detail what you did on a weekly/ monthly/ yearly regiment to achieve your goal? Did you indicate a measurable goal that you have control over achieving? Remember, this goal should not depend on others (like becoming captain of a team). If you indicate a class, did you confirm that you did not receive class credit?
- **EXPEDITION/EXPLORATION**
  - Did you include the following....
    - Your Challenge Level
    - Your Immersion in a different environment/culture
    - Your Unique Experience
    - Your Planning and preparation (beyond meal planning)
    - Instances of thinking on your feet

SUMBIT YOUR RECORD BOOK

You may submit your Record Book once it is complete – we accept record books on a rolling basis. If you are interested in attending a specific annual presentation (like the Gold Medal Ceremony or a local presentation) make sure to check our website for deadlines. The annual Gold Medal Record Book submission date is February 1 of a given ceremony year. Items must be postmarked, emailed or faxed by this date. If you have a specific timeframe you are interested in being approved, make sure to allow enough time for the approval and possible revisions. If you wait until a deadline, we cannot guarantee approval in time for your need.

HOW TO SUBMIT A RECORD BOOK AND REVISIONS

Via Mail – Send via regular mail to PO Box 77440, Washington, DC 20013 (do not send certified or with signature required).

Online - information@congressionalaward.org or directly to your Program Manager (check our website)

Fax – (202) 226-0131

We do not confirm when items are received. If you would like to check on the status of an application, you may do so after two weeks, when we have had time to receive and process your application.

The Congressional Award Record Book

I am applying for:

Certificate ☐ Medal ☐

Bronze ☐ Silver ☐ Gold ☐

Prior Approvals: _____

Date of Birth: ___ ___ / ___ ___ / ___ ___ ___ ___

Office Use Only:

_____

_____

☐ I have moved - please update my address (below)

Record Book

(Please print or type)

Name: _____

Address: _____ _____

Street Address City, State, Zip

Phone: ( ) - Social Media Handle: _____

Email: _____ **Include the email that you use the most*

Attending School: YES ☐ NO ☐ Year of Study: _____

School: _____

Employed: YES ☐ NO ☐ If Yes: Part-Time ☐ Full-Time ☐

Employer: _____

What I have gained by participating in the Congressional Award:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

My goals and requirements to earn a Congressional Award have been achieved as stated herein.

Signed: _____ **Date:** ___ / ___ / ___

ADVISOR INFORMATION:

Name: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____ _____

Street Address City, State, Zip

Phone: ( ) - (H) ( ) - (W)

Relationship: _____ Occupation: _____

Advisor's **Comments** concerning the candidate's participation in the Congressional Award:

_____

_____

_____

_____

I certify that the candidate established goals in accordance with program guidelines and has satisfactorily completed all goals and requirements for the Congressional Award.

Signed: _____ **Date:** ___ / ___ / ___

Advisor Signature

Submit this six-page Record Book after you have achieved your goals and completed the required hours and months.
Please print legibly; Electronic Record Book Pages are Available at www.congressionalaward.org

Mail completed Record Book to: The Congressional Award, PO Box 77440, Washington, DC 20013

Candidate: _____

VALIDATION OF ACTIVITY HOURS

VOLUNTARY PUBLIC SERVICE

Describe your **goal**: _____

Describe your **activities** to achieve your goal: _____

Describe what you **learned**: _____

Describe how you served the **greater community at large**: _____

Months of Activity (*denote hours logged by month ⇩*) **Total Hours** (*only report **NEW** hours*): _____

YEAR	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC

If your activities for this goal span more than four years, please copy this page as needed

VALIDATOR INFORMATION:

Name: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____ _____
Street Address City, State, Zip

Phone: _____ (H) _____ (W)

Relationship: _____ Occupation: _____

Validator **Comments**: _____

I certify that the hours, activities and goal as stated above were completed by the candidate:

Signed: _____ **Date:** / /
Validator's Signature

*Remember: If you have more than one goal, you must complete a separate sheet for each goal (make copies as needed). No more than **four** goals are allowed in Voluntary Public Service per submission.*

Candidate: _____

VALIDATION OF ACTIVITY HOURS

Personal Development

Describe your **goal**: _____

_____

_____

Describe your **activities** to achieve your goal: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Describe what you **learned**: _____

_____

_____

_____

Months of Activity (*denote hours logged by month ⇩*) **Total Hours** (*only report **NEW** hours*): _____

YEAR	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC

If your activities for this goal span more than four years, please copy this page as needed

VALIDATOR INFORMATION:

Name: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____ _____

Street Address City, State, Zip

Phone: _____ (H) _____ (W)

Relationship: _____ Occupation: _____

Validator **Comments**: _____

_____

_____

_____

I certify that the hours, activities and goal as stated above were completed by the candidate:

Signed: _____ **Date:** ____ / ____ / ____

Validator's Signature

*Remember: If you have more than one goal, you must complete a separate sheet for each goal (make copies as needed). No more than **two** goals are allowed in Personal Development per submission.*

Candidate: _____

VALIDATION OF ACTIVITY HOURS

Physical Fitness

Describe your **goal**: _____

_____

_____

Describe your **activities** to achieve your goal: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Describe how your **skill level changed**: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Months of Activity (*denote hours logged by month ⇩*) **Total Hours** (only report ***NEW*** hours): _____

YEAR	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC

If your activities for this goal span more than four years, please copy this page as needed

VALIDATOR INFORMATION:

Name: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____ _____

Street Address City, State, Zip

Phone: _____ (H) _____ (W)

Relationship: _____ Occupation: _____

Validator **Comments**: _____

_____

_____

I certify that the hours, activities and goal as stated above were completed by the candidate:

Signed: _____ **Date:** / /

Validator's Signature

*Remember: If you have more than one goal, you must complete a separate sheet for each goal (make copies as needed). No more than **two** goals are allowed in Physical Fitness per submission.*

Candidate: _____

VALIDATION OF ACTIVITY HOURS AND OVERVIEW

Expedition/Exploration

Describe your **goal**: _____

Provide a brief overview of your **planned activities** to achieve your goal: _____

PLANNING INFORMATION: *Planning and Preparation Dates and Hours*

Planning Dates : ___/___/_____ - ___/___/_____ *Planning* Hours: _____

ACTIVITY INFORMATION: *ACTUAL Expedition/Exploration Activity Location & Dates (start to finish)*

Where did you go: _____

When did you go: ___/___/_____ - ___/___/_____

Days: _____ Nights: _____ ***Must show at least 6-8 hours of Activity to Count as a Day**

VALIDATOR INFORMATION:

Name: _____ Email: _____

Address: _____ _____

Street Address City, State, Zip

Phone: _____ (H) _____ (W)

Relationship: _____ Occupation: _____

Validator Comments: _____

I certify that the hours, activities and goal as stated above were completed by the candidate:

Signed: _____ **Date:** ___/___/_____

Validator's Signature

Candidate: _____

Expedition/Exploration

Directions: Use this form and additional pages as needed to record your Expedition/Exploration answers for the questions below, as well as a complete description of your entire trip - from start to finish. This should include planning and training notes, your planned itinerary and a detailed day-by-day account of your actual activity. Remember, we can only review what is submitted. Be as detailed as possible about your experience and what you learned.

Describe the Following

1 **How did YOU plan or prepare for this activity? Be as detailed as possible indicating YOUR initiative.**

Did you schedule and investigate your travel options? Did you research different venues or locations? Did you coordinate with anyone before your arrival? How did you make your trip or activity happen? If you worked with a group, how did you make this trip happen for you? How did you leave your mark?

2 **How was this activity unique and unlike anything YOU have ever done before? How were YOU immersed in a different culture or environment?**

If you travel or camp a lot, how was this trip or activity different? How did you expand your horizons and learn about a unique culture or environment? How did this put you outside of your comfort zone? The Expedition/Exploration is about exploring a unique culture or environment - how did you accomplish this?

3 **How were YOU challenged? Include examples of YOU thinking on YOUR feet.**

Before and during your trip, what obstacles did you encounter and how did you handle them? This activity, especially at the higher levels, is about you taking the initiative and rising to challenges that come up while exploring a unique environment. If you got lost on a foreign subway, did you wait for your parents to direct you or did you take the lead? If a venue was closed unexpectedly, did you make other plans or just go back to a hotel? Show us how your were able to adapt to the real world in a different environment or in planning for your trip. If you worked with a group, how did you show leadership in implementing your trip?

4 **Include a detailed itinerary of what YOU plan to do.**

Detail your planned trip from start to finish. Make sure you can show at least 6-8 hours of immersion activities each day. Include where you are planning on going and why, how you plan to explore the unique culture or environment (through food, sightseeing, etc), how you are going to learn about this new environment. If using public transportation is a large component of your trip and write up, make sure to include your overall plan and method for using it.

5 **Include a detailed write up of YOUR actual trip (a day-to-day account). This should include examples of the above and should detail YOUR trip from start to finish (including travel).**

Tell us what you did! This should be the most detailed portion of your write up, including how your plans came to fruition. Include details about what you learned, what you saw, what you took in. Did all of your plans go smoothly or were there bumps along the road? How did you handle any hiccups? How did you explore the environment or culture for at least 6-8 hours? Show us what you did - reflect on this experience! This should not read like a class assignment or paper - we care about where you want but want to see from you what you learned through real world immersion.

6 **Please include anything else you think would highlight YOUR accomplishments on your trip.**
What did you take away from your trip? Are you now maybe planning on returning to the location for future adventures or experiences? Did you maybe learn you could do something that you never would have expected? Did you try a food for the first time and now can't get enough? Did you communicate in languages and now you want to learn more? Did you learn a new camping skill that you will employee next time?

Gold Medal Record Books require detailed explanations of your planning and your actual trip. If you are planning on submitting an Expedition/Exploration that was approved at a lower level for the Gold Medal Level, be as detailed as possible at your first submission. The higher levels of the Award require a high degree of challenge and immersion. We can only review what you submit, so be as detailed as possible from the start.

National Partners of THE CONGRESSIONAL AWARD

We recommend working with one or many of our partners in earning your Award

- 4-H
- AMERICORPS NCCC & FEMA CORPS
- BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA
- GIRL SCOUTS OF THE USA
- HOBY
- MFAN
- PEOPLE TO PEOPLE INTERNATIONAL
- PRESIDENTIAL CLASSROOM
- UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
- YOUTH SERVICE AMERICA

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