



# PROGRAM BOOK



## U.S. Congress' Award for Youth

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

# YOUR JOURNEY STARTS HERE



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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 Congress' only charity and 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.

# 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 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/Exploration.

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.



## REGISTER



Register at [www.congressionalaward.org](http://www.congressionalaward.org). The day you sign up is the day you may begin counting activity towards the program. Choose your Advisor.

## 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.

## IMPACT



Show your community and yourself what you can do! Log activity in pursuit of your goals and be sure to track your hours and months of activities.

## SUBMIT



Once you've met the requirements for an award level, submit your Record Book to the National Office. Review time takes 4-6 weeks for lower levels and 6-8 weeks for the Gold Medal level.

## CONTINUE



While you're waiting for your Record Book to be reviewed you may begin working towards the next award level.

## EARN



Once approved, you will be presented with The Congressional Award! Certificates are mailed directly to the awardee and Medals are presented by your member of Congress.

# PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

The award level structure is cumulative, meaning hours and months spent on one award level will automatically be counted towards 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
<b>Voluntary Public Service</b>	30 Hours	60 Hours	90 Hours
<b>Voluntary Public Service</b>	No Minimum Months	No Minimum Months	6 Months
<b>Personal Development</b>	15 Hours	30 Hours	45 Hours
<b>Personal Development</b>	No Minimum Months	No Minimum Months	6 Months
<b>Physical Fitness</b>	15 Hours	30 Hours	45 Hours
<b>Physical Fitness</b>	No Minimum Months	No Minimum Months	6 Months
<b>Expedition/ Exploration</b>	1 Day	2 Days	3 Days

## MEDALS

	Bronze Medal	Silver Medal	Gold Medal
<b>Voluntary Public Service</b>	100 Hours	200 Hours	400 Hours
<b>Voluntary Public Service</b>	7 Months	12 Months	24 Months
<b>Personal Development</b>	50 Hours	100 Hours	200 Hours
<b>Personal Development</b>	7 Months	12 Months	24 Months
<b>Physical Fitness</b>	50 Hours	100 Hours	200 Hours
<b>Physical Fitness</b>	7 Months	12 Months	24 Months
<b>Expedition/ Exploration</b>	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 towards 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 one hour of activity in a month for that month to count.**

**Months of activity do not need to be consecutive.**

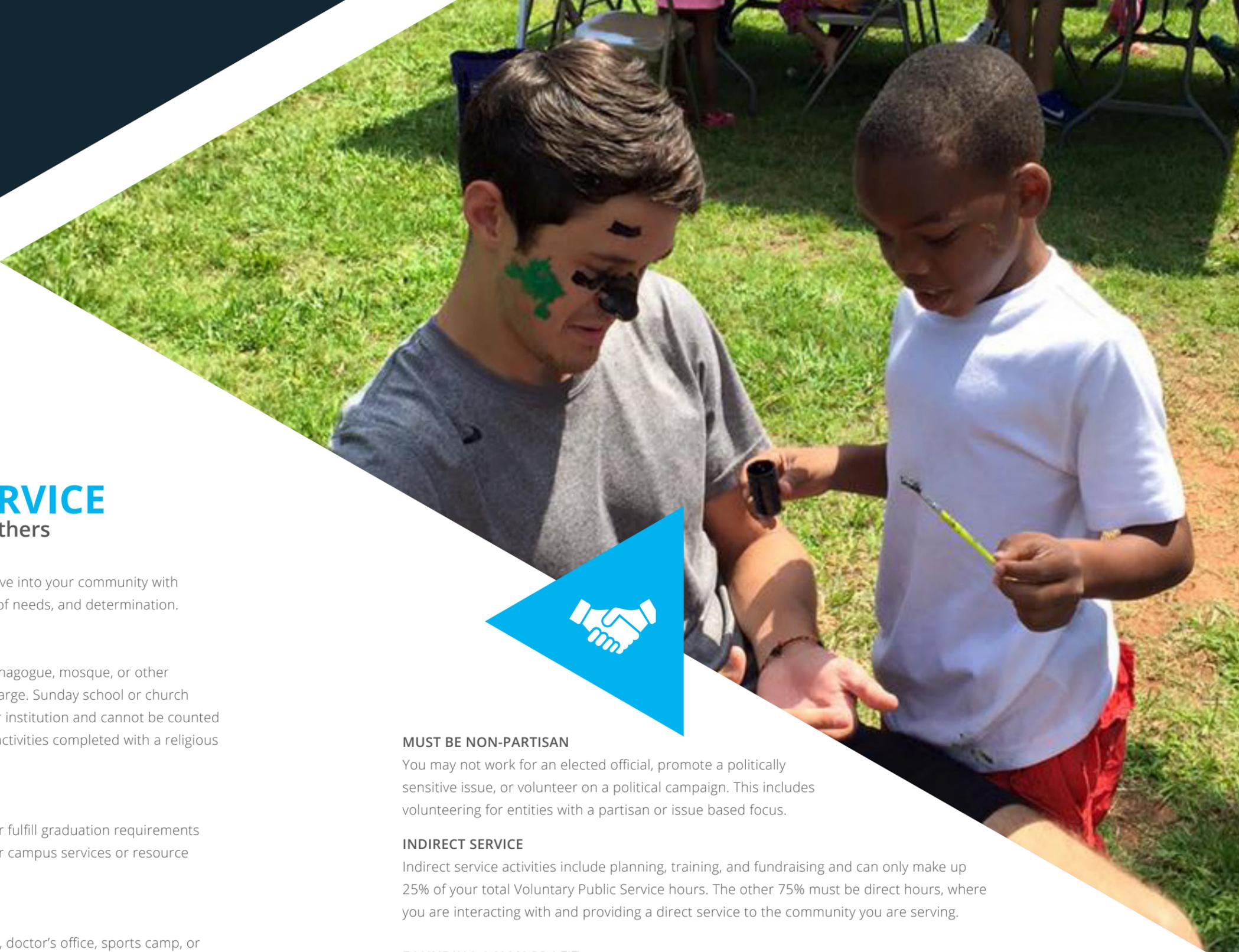
**Months in a program area only count once.**

Example: If you play ice hockey and soccer and you have activity for each in January 2020 you can only count January 2020 one time towards your Physical Fitness 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 SPREADING OF FAITH OR PROSELYTIZING**

Activities coordinated or completed under the direction of a church, synagogue, mosque, or other religious institution 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 towards Voluntary Public Service. In addition, Voluntary Public Service activities completed with a religious institution **MUST NOT** include any religious instruction or proselytizing.

### **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 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.

### **NO ENTRANCE / MEMBERSHIP FEES**

Activities completed through an organization that charges a fee for participants may only be used towards Voluntary Public Service if the organization offers financial aid/scholarships for participants who may not be 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.

### **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 amount 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.

# PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Pursuing a new interest or advancing 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 previously participated in, but be sure that your goal challenges you to develop or improve your skills 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.



# PHYSICAL FITNESS

Improving one's quality of life

## 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 previously participated in, 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 class 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 team captain is not an acceptable goal as your success depends on the decisions of others.

## MUST BE ISOLATED ACTIVITY

Using fitness 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.



## EXPEDITION / EXPLORATION

### Immersion in an unfamiliar environment or culture

An Expedition/Exploration 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/Exploration 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/Exploration 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.

#### 6-8 HOURS PER DAY

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

#### 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. You may re-submit this trip with a higher level Record Book, keeping in mind that the National Office will not necessarily approve a trip at a higher level, 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.

#### ONLY SUBMIT ONE TRIP PER RECORD BOOK SUBMISSION

You only need to submit one Expedition OR Exploration with each Record Book submission. For example, if your first Record Book submission is for the Silver Medal, you only need to submit a three-day, two-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/Exploration. The Record Book includes a list of questions to help guide you. Your submission should not consist of brief bullet points.

# GENERAL ELIGIBILITY & REQUIREMENTS

You must complete your activities **prior to your 24th birthday**.

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.

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

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.**

**You only need to submit your Record Book ONCE**. Please do not send multiple copies. Similarly, when submitting revisions, you only need to submit the updated or revised Record Book pages.

**Do not apply for multiple award levels** at once. Please only submit one Record Book at a time, meaning do not send multiple Record Books for multiple award levels in one submission.

You are allowed up to **four Voluntary Public Service goals, two Personal Development goals, and two Physical Fitness goals** for each Record Book submission. Additionally, you **only need to submit one Expedition/Exploration** that meets the minimum day or overnight requirements for the level in which you are applying.

You may collaborate with others while working towards your goals. However, the **activities and hours that are recorded on your Record Book should be ones that you completed as an individual**.

**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.

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

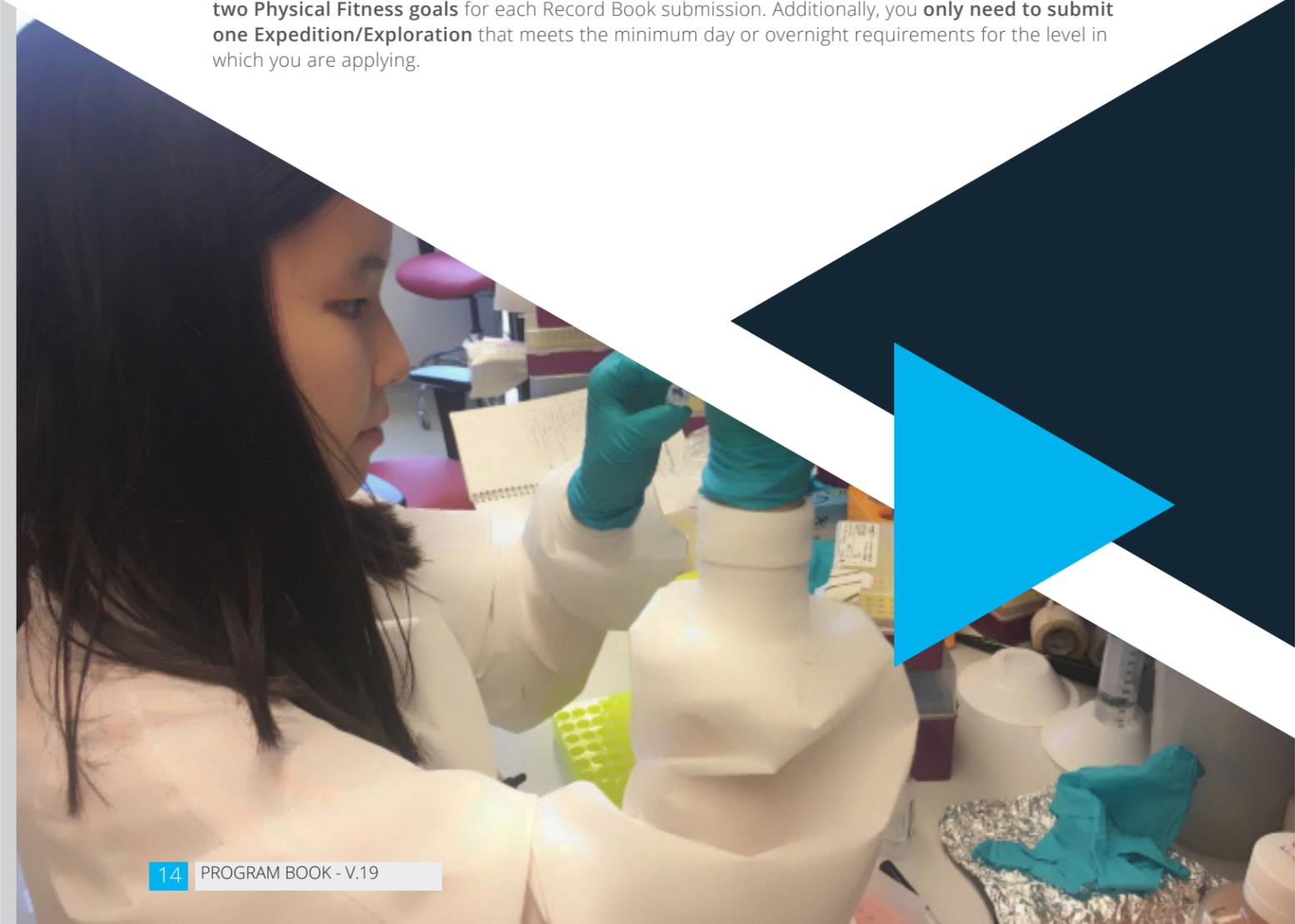
If you have any disabilities or require special consideration, please let our office know. The **program is flexible** and we are happy to assist any way we can.

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

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.

**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.

**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, as well as the Bronze Medal.



## AVOID COMMON MISTAKES

- Double check that you are submitting a complete Record Book - including all dates, signatures, hour totals, and a detailed write-up for your Expedition/Exploration.
- Ensure that you are submitting accurate and up to date contact information on the cover page. This is how you will be contacted regarding your submission.

**TOTAL MONTHS for this goal: 7**      **TOTAL HOURS for this goal: 113**

Enter year(s) and check all months where activity was logged for this goal. Only report new hours logged since your last Record Book submission.

YEAR	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
2019	X	X										
2018					X	X	X				X	X

- 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 membership file.
- Confirm that your Validators have signed each Record Book page AFTER your activities were completed.
- You and your Advisor should be the last to sign the cover page of your Record Book after ALL activity is complete and all of your Validators have signed the Record Book pages.
- Use the official Record Book to capture your activities. We will only review what is recorded in the Record Book. Although not required, you may include supplementary documents like logs of hours, supporting literature, 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 1 and all Revisions must be submitted by March 15 of that year.

You may submit your Record Book via mail to our mailing address or by email as a single PDF attachment. We are not able to accept submissions through Google Docs, Dropbox, or other document host platforms.

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 mail or email.

Once approved, the National Office will mail your approval packet. Certificates are mailed directly to the awardee. If you've earned a medal, we will notify your member of Congress to set up an award presentation.

Once you have submitted your Record Book, you may begin working towards 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 have your Validator and Advisor re-sign and date your Record Book pages 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 1 submission and March 15 revision deadlines are postmark and email 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, our office will notify the office of your U.S. Representative. We'll coordinate the medal shipment and other materials needed for a presentation.



## LOCAL PRESENTATIONS

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 (often 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.

## REGIONAL & 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 Advisor 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 with you and sign the cover page. Your Advisor's signature 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 (one for each goal)

- 1) Once you have completed your hours and months in a particular goal, your Validator should sign and date your Record Book page 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.

# ADVISOR / VALIDATOR CHECKLIST



**ADVISORS**

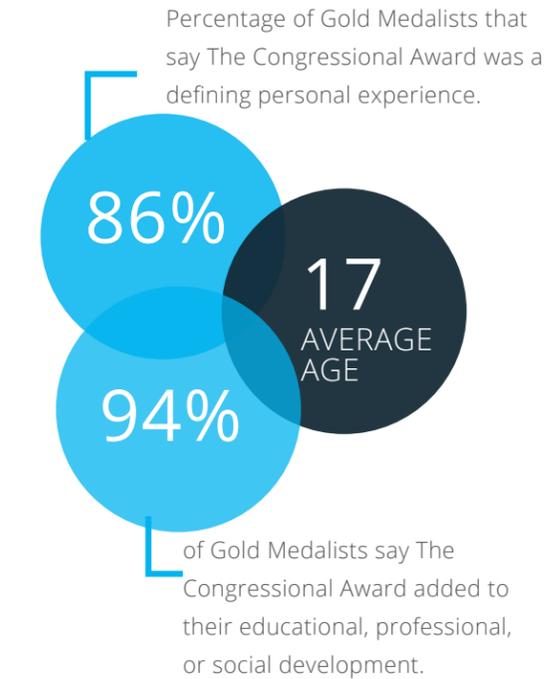


**VALIDATORS**

- ✓ 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 towards their goals.
- ✓ If the participant needs to revise goals, assist in helping set 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 have obtained signatures from each of their Validators.
- ✓ Sign and date the cover page of the participant's Record Book to confirm all of their goals and activities. Remind the participant to make copies of their Record Book prior to submission.
- ✓ Assist the participant in addressing any revisions.

- ✓ Review the requirements and guidelines with the participant.
- ✓ Discuss the specific requirement for the program area in which you will be working with the participant.
- ✓ Help the participant identify their starting level in a particular activity.
- ✓ 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 sign and date the Record Book page.

# OUR MISSION IN ACTION



**We build tomorrow's leaders, today.**



The Congressional Award
 @theaward
 @thecongressionalaward

The Congressional Award is a 501(c)(3) IRS designated tax exempt organization, written into law under Public Law 96-114: The Congressional Award Act.

# CONTACT US

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# MAKE YOUR IMPACT

