



# The Congressional Award: A Guide for Schools

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## Welcome

Thank you for your interest in The Congressional Award Program. A Congressional Award is the highest honor that the United States Congress can bestow on a young person. Earning any level of The Congressional Award is a great way for young people to enhance their resume, get involved in their communities, broaden their network, and become well-rounded young adults.

This guide will serve as a helpful resource for a school to become familiar with The Congressional Award program. It provides background on The Congressional Award program, a school's role in the program, the efforts that participants must make to earn a Congressional Award, and the ways that participants can stay involved in the program after earning an Award.

Should you have any questions about this process, please do not hesitate to email us at [information@congressionalaward.org](mailto:information@congressionalaward.org).

Welcome and let's get started!

Background

## About

The United States Congress established The Congressional Award Foundation to recognize initiative, service, and achievement of 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 Senator Malcolm Wallop of Wyoming and Congressman James Howard of New Jersey.

Today The Congressional Award Foundation remains Congress' only charity and the highest honor a member of the House or Senate may bestow upon a youth. The program is non-partisan, voluntary, and non-competitive. Young people may register when they turn 13 1/2 years old and must complete 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. Earning The Congressional Award is an exciting and enriching way for youth to get involved in local communities. This is not an award for past accomplishments. Instead, youth are honored for setting personally challenging goals and meeting needs in their communities.

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

## Benefits To Earning a Congressional Award

Participants can use the Congressional Award(s) on college, scholarship, and job applications.

Award earners have opportunities to interact with their Member of Congress via Medal Ceremonies and other Congressional Award events.

Through teaching participants to practice long-term goal setting, the program establishes a sense of self-confidence and commitment in youth, and helps enhance problem-solving skills, leadership abilities, and the capabilities to work as part of a team – traits that are valued by employers and institutions of higher education.

The six levels of The Award provide tangible evidence of success and effort on the part of the young person.

The program is open to any young person between the ages of 14 and 24, regardless of their GPA, socioeconomic status, citizenship status, etc. They may register when they turn 13.5 years old and can submit activities completed up to their 24<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Participants are exposed to mentor-based opportunities.

The program is well-balanced, containing four diverse program areas that encourage youth to explore new areas of interest and learn more about themselves and the world.

The Award encourages the establishment of community networks and links.

The flexibility of The Award program enables participants to choose activities and move at a pace that is personally best.

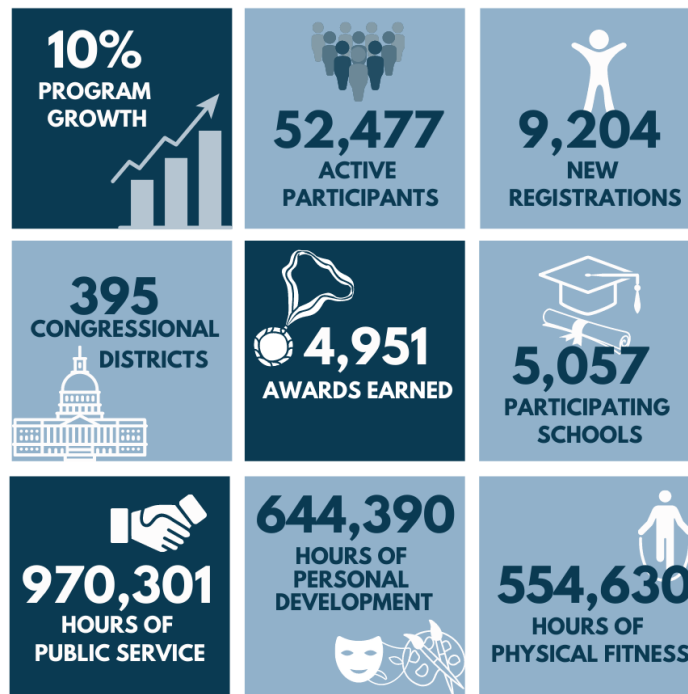
## Impact Report

### OUR MISSION

The Congressional Award provides opportunities for young people to unleash their potential by achieving personal goals focused on volunteerism, character development, and fitness.

### OUR IMPACT

FROM THE 2020-2021 REPORT



#### ACROSS AMERICA AND THE GLOBE



## Program Terms

Congressional Award(s)- There are six levels of The Congressional Award that participants can earn: Bronze Certificate, Silver Certificate, Gold Certificate, Bronze Medal, Silver Medal, and Gold Medal.

Program Book- A PDF that outlines details of The Congressional Award program.

Record Book- The way in which the participant logs goals and hours and months of activity to earn the Award.

Four Program Areas- Participants must complete the requirements in all four program areas: Voluntary Public Service, Personal Development, Physical Fitness, and Expedition/Exploration.

Advisor- An adult mentor that helps guide the participant through the Congressional Award program. This can be anyone who is not a parent, relative, or peer of the participant.

Validator- A person who signs off on a participant's specific goal and activities. This can be anyone who is not a parent, relative, or peer of the participant. If a participant has trouble finding a Validator, the Advisor can act as the Validator instead.



## Resources

The Congressional Award Website: <https://www.congressionalaward.org/>

Program Book: [https://www.congressionalaward.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Program\\_Book\\_v19\\_Single.pdf](https://www.congressionalaward.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Program_Book_v19_Single.pdf)

Record Book: <https://congressionalaward.submittable.com/signup?ReturnUrl=%252fprojects>

- The Record Book is no longer in the format that is found in the Program Book. New Record Book submissions will now be online through a platform called Submittable.

Submittable Guide for Participants: [Click here](#) for the guide.

COVID Program Accommodations: <https://www.congressionalaward.org/initiatives/covid-19-tools-tips/>

- All program accommodations have been extended until June 30, 2022.

Virtual Expedition/Exploration Information: <https://www.congressionalaward.org/virtual-expeditions-explorations/>

- Instead of completing an in-person trip for the Expedition/Exploration goal, a participant can complete the virtual option. Because this is a COVID accommodation, the entire Record Book must be submitted by June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022, if this option is selected. If completing a traditional, in-person trip, the June deadline does not have to be met.

Program Manager email: [Please see the Contact Us page \(page 37\)](#)

- Please email questions and concerns. If a participant has a disability or requires other special program accommodations, I am happy to assist.

## Program Requirements

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

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

## Important Dates

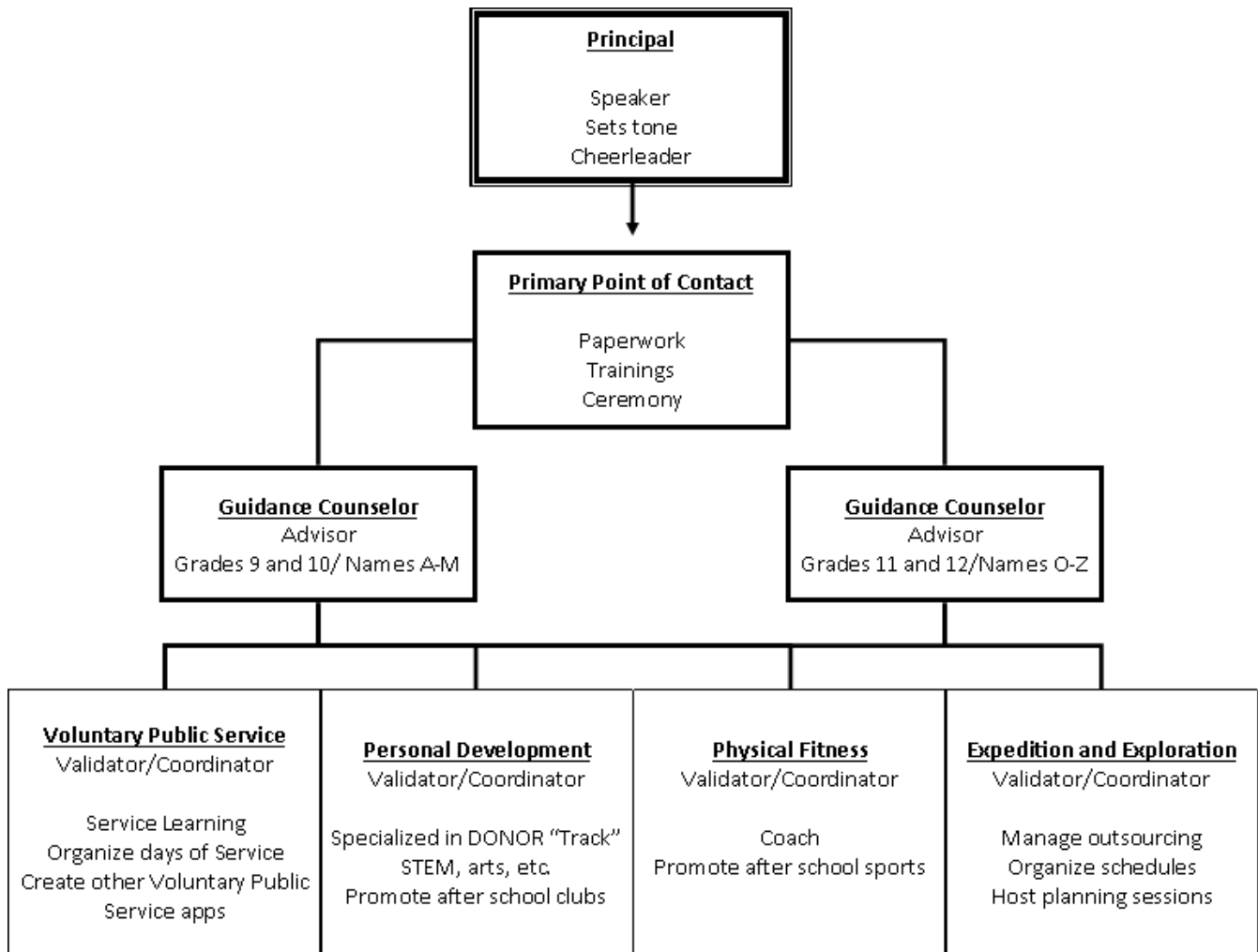
The Congressional Award is a self-paced program, and Record Books are accepted and approved on a rolling basis.

If participants want to submit a Gold Medal Record Book, the submission must be submitted by February 1st of any given year. If the submission requires revisions, those must be submitted by March 15 of the same year. If this deadline is not met, the submission is still valid, but you will be considered for the next year's Gold Medal Class instead.

If not submitting for a Gold Medal, there are no deadlines that must be met! Participants are free to move at a personal pace.

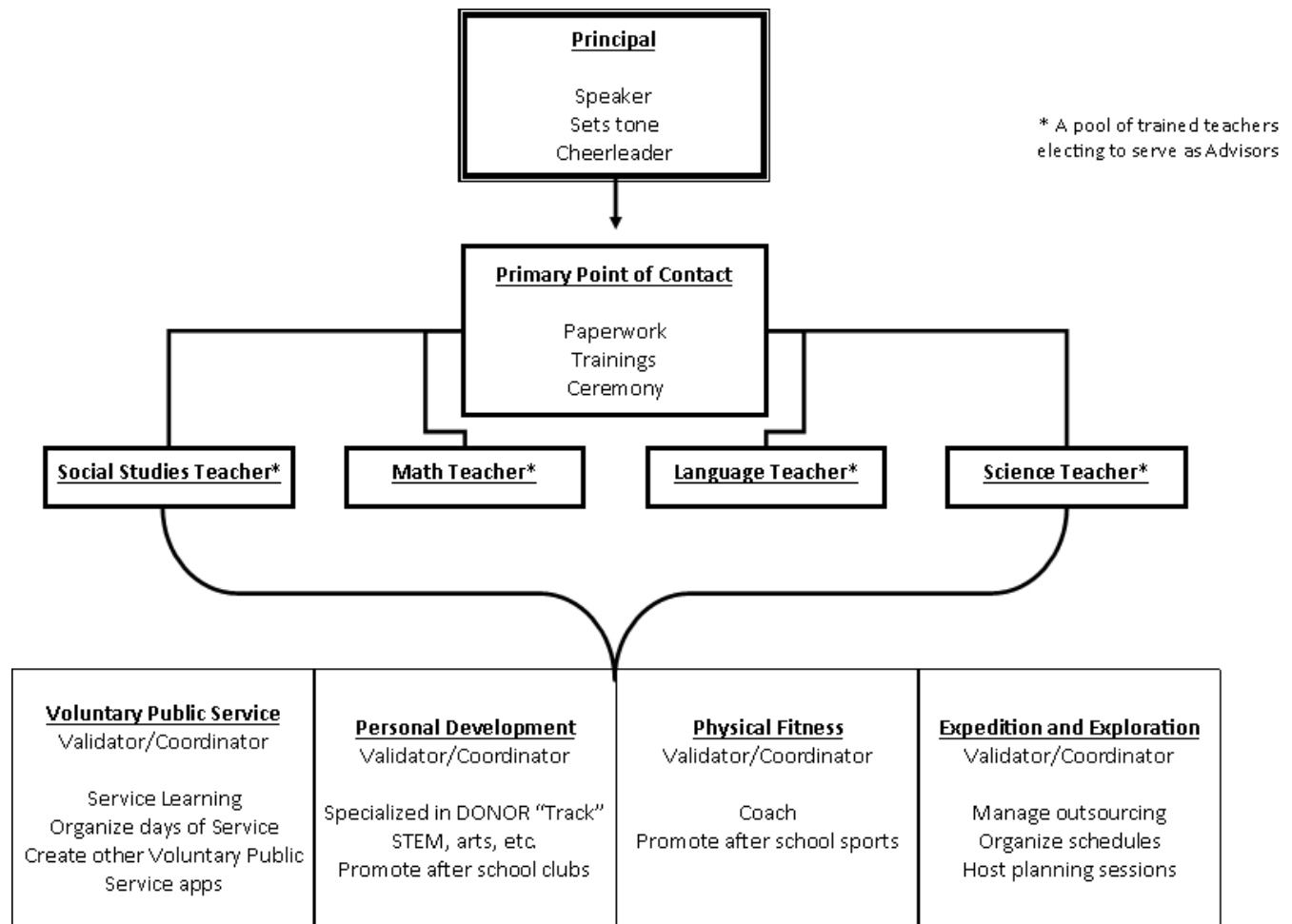
## School Involvement

## Your School's Role



\*This is an example of past structures. A school may have a different structure and can adjust accordingly.

## Internal Program Support Structure



## Adult Mentors

At the Congressional Award, adult mentors can be a participant by becoming an **Advisor/Validator**.

### Why Advisors and Validators?

An Advisor or Validator play an important role in a young person's pursuit of the Congressional Award. To earn the Award, participants set goals in four program areas: Voluntary Public Service; Personal Development; Physical Fitness; and Expedition/Exploration. **Advisors** guide participants through the goal-setting process in each of the four program areas and monitor progress toward the Congressional Award. **Validators** assist the participant with individual activities.

While any 14 to 23 year old may pursue a Congressional Award, it takes the commitment of volunteer adults to help each realize potential. Volunteer Advisors and Validators in the Congressional Award are essential. The guidance will be remembered long after the participant successfully meets his or her goals and is presented a Bronze, Silver, or Gold Certificate or Medal by the United States Congress.

### Who is Eligible?

Any adult may serve as an Advisor or Validator with the exception of parents, relatives, and peers. Congressional Award Gold Medal earners may also serve, regardless of their age. Keep in mind that it is the responsibility of the young people to identify their Advisor and Validators.

Advisors meet with the participant as personally challenging goals are set, stay in touch while the participant pursues the Award, and provide assistance with the Record Book detailing goals and activities. Teachers, coaches, neighbors, club sponsors, and civic leaders all make excellent advisors.

The appropriate Validator depends on the participant's activities. Validators should be knowledgeable in the activities a participant pursues to achieve a particular goal. For example, if a young person's goal and activities involved basketball, a coach would make a suitable validator. Similarly, if a young person volunteered at an animal shelter, an employee or the volunteer coordinator would be an appropriate validator.

## How to Become a Program Partner

### Partnership Requirements & Expectations

A minimum of 50 students enrolled in the Congressional Award program, with 50% submitting a record book for any level of the Award within their first year.

The one-time registration fee per student is \$25.00. A fee waiver is available for students who demonstrate financial need.

\*If these requirements and expectations are unobtainable for a school, please contact the National Office so a plan to assist the school may be made.



## How to Promote the Program

### Congressional Award Club

As we understand that each school and school district differ, these steps are suggested in working to start a Congressional Award School Program in a school or district.

1. Designate a Club Advisor to oversee the Award at the school
2. Register the Club and Advisor with the National Office to receive materials and information
  - a. Reach out to the regional Program Manager (email on page 34) to inform them of the club's registration.
3. Encourage students to join the Congressional Award Club
4. Register each new student-participant with the National Office online
  - a. Reach out to the regional Program Manager (email on page 34) to inform them of the club members' registrations.
5. Hold monthly meetings to gauge student-participant progress

### Model Timeline

- Back to School
  - Help students register and start working towards an Award
  - Check-in with returning students
- Fall
  - Hold monthly meetings to gauge progress
- December
  - Meet with each participant as Winter Break approaches
- January
  - Check-in with students at the start of new semester
- Spring
  - Hold monthly meetings to gauge progress and submit record books to the National Office
- End of School
  - Meet with each student for a final time to set goals for the summer

### Congressional Award Materials

Online Program Books and more information can be found on our website here:

<https://www.congressionalaward.org/>

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### **Can volunteer opportunities provided by the school count towards the Congressional Award?**

*Yes! As long as the activity does not count for a class or course credit, it may be counted toward the Congressional Award.*

### **Does SAT/ACT Prep count for Personal Development?**

*Yes! SAT/ACT Prep work can be counted for Personal Development as long as it does not count for class credit.*

### **Can after-school sports activity count for the Physical Fitness program area?**

*Yes! As long as the sports activity does not count for Physical Education or any other class credit.*

**For more questions on specific activities, you may use the activity checker, located on the website:**

**<https://www.congressionalaward.org/contact-us/>**

## Examples of Existing Partnerships

Laude Horton Watkins High School

- [Link to news story](#)

Tempe Prep Academy

- [Link to club page](#)
  - Creating a club and space in order for participants to learn about opportunities and work together

Belmont University

- [Link to news story](#)

## Participant Guide

## Steps To Earning Your Congressional Award

1. Read the Program Book to become familiar with the program. See the link under 'Resources'.
2. Identify which level of The Award is being worked toward. Beginning at the Bronze Certificate level is encouraged.
3. Locate an adult mentor to act as the Advisor.
4. Register (for free) online: <https://www.congressionalaward.org/register/>
  - Only hours and months of activity that occur after your registration date may count.
  - **YOU MUST FIRST REGISTER TO EARN YOUR AWARD**
5. After registering, sign up and create a Submittable Account to submit the online Record Book.
  - a. Go to [The Congressional Award website](#)
  - b. Go to the 'Participants' tab
  - c. Select 'Current'
  - d. Scroll down to 'Ready to Start Your First Online Record Book?' and select 'Click Here'
  - e. Sign up and create a Submittable account. It is recommended to use the same email address that was used to register for The Congressional Award.
6. After creating an account, follow the ['Submittable Guide for Participants'](#) to see the process of completing the Record Book and earning a Congressional Award.

## Sample Record Book

This section contains examples of activities a participant can complete to earn a Congressional Award. It also shows how to log hours and months of activity. These activities are simply examples. Find activities and write responses instead of using the examples. If guidance is needed in selecting activities to complete the requirements in all four program areas, please request guidance: [information@congressionalaward.org](mailto:information@congressionalaward.org)

### Voluntary Public Service:

What is your goal? \*

My goal was to reduce hunger in my community.

Describe your activities to achieve your goal. \*

To achieve my goal of reducing hunger in my community, I volunteered at various soup kitchens and food banks. While volunteering, my duties included prepar

What did you learn? \*

I learned that my community has a large hunger problem that needs to be addressed. I also learned that no act of service is too small to make a difference.

How did you serve the greater community at large? \*

I served the greater community at large by serving those in need.

TOTAL HOURS for this goal: \*

30

Additional Voluntary Public Service goal?

☐ Check here if you have an additional Voluntary Public Service goal.

Do any of your Voluntary Public Service activities include spreading of faith, activities related to a hot-button or political issue, or working under the direction or for the benefit of a for-profit/private business, private school, or religious institution? \*

☐ Yes

☒ No

All Voluntary Public Service activities should be open to the public and serve the greater community at large. If the community you served was required to pay a fee to access your service (i.e. a camp, tutoring center, museum), that organization must have a nonprofit status in order to count those hours. This does not include private schools.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
January					10
February					
March					
April					
May					
June					
July					
August					
September					
October					
November				10	
December				10	
Hours:	Months:				
30	3				

## Personal Development:

What is your goal? \*

My goal is to learn more about broadcast journalism by participating in the Deanwood Recreation Center's Broadcast Journalism Program.

Describe your activities to achieve your goal. \*

To achieve my goal of learning about broadcast journalism I conducted interviews, researched interviewees...

What did you learn? \*

Throughout my participation in the program I learned how to be an effective communicator, how to conduct interviews...

TOTAL HOURS for this goal: \*

15

Additional Personal Development goal?

☐ Check here if you have an additional Personal Development goal.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
January					15
February					
March					
April					
May					
June					
July					
August					
September					
October					
November					
December					



Hours:	Months:				
15	1				

## Physical Fitness:

What is your goal? \*

My goal is to strengthen my core through various at home exercises.

Describe your activities to achieve your goal. \*

To achieve my goal, I worked out 5 days a week and did a variety of core strengthening exercises. For example, I did planks, crunches, leg lifts, and Russian twi

What did you learn? \*

I learned that consistent exercise can change your body, how to stick to a workout regimen, and by exercising, I tend to be in a more positive mood.

TOTAL HOURS for this goal: \*

15

### Additional Physical Fitness goal?

☐

Check here if you have an additional Physical Fitness goal.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
January					15
February					
March					
April					
May					
June					
July					
August					
September					
October					
November					
December					

Hours:	Months:				
15	1				

## Expedition/Exploration:

For this section, please select if choosing to complete an in-person trip or a virtual trip.

### In-Person Trip:

If selecting to complete an in-person trip, please see the [Program Book](#) for guidance into the requirements.

Please select if you are submitting an In-Person or Virtual Expedition/Exploration. \*

- ☒ In-Person  
☐ Virtual

Due to travel restrictions and safety concerns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, all participants will be able to submit Virtual Expeditions/Explorations with modified guidelines through January 1, 2021. Please review the Virtual Expedition/Exploration guidelines [here](#).

Location of Expedition/Exploration: \*

A location of personal choice. The Trip does not have to be costly or far off to count!

Trip Start Date: \*

12/08/2021

Trip End Date: \*

12/08/2021

How many days? \*

1

How many nights? \*

0

**What is your goal? \***

What is your goal for the trip? What do you want to do, see, learn, experience, etc.?

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

What are you planning to do while on your trip?

**How did you plan and prepare for this activity? \***

Talk about your planning process: how you selected the location, materials that you prepared, things that you packed, how you decided on the activities to do, etc.

Be as detailed as possible indicating your initiative. How did you investigate and schedule your travel options? Did you research varying 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 was this activity unique and unlike anything you have ever done before? How were you immersed in a different culture or environment? \***

How was this activity different 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?

**How were you challenged? Include examples of thinking on your feet. \***

These can be challenges that you encountered in the planning process and challenges that you encountered during your trip.

Before and during the trip, what obstacles did you encounter and how did you handle them? How did you take the initiative and rise to challenges that came up while exploring and unfamiliar environment? Show us how you were able to adapt to the real world in a different environment or in planning for this trip. If you worked with a group, how did you show leadership in implementing your trip?

**Outline a detailed itinerary of what you plan to do. \***

This should be a day-to-day schedule of all the things that you plan to do on your trip. It is okay if you do not actually end up fully completing your itinerary or doing the things in the order that you planned them. We just want to see that you can plan a trip!

Detail your planned trip from the 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.), and how you are going to learn about this new environment.

**Provide a detailed write up of your actual trip (a day-to-day account). \***

Please see the example write-up for guidance.

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, and 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?

**Is there anything else you think would highlight your accomplishments on your trip? \***

What are some things that you are proud of from your trip? What were your favorite parts?

What did you take away from your trip? Are you now planning on returning to the location for future adventures or experiences? Did you 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 learn a new language or skill that you will employ on future travels?

**Additional Expedition/Exploration?**

☐ Click here if you have an additional Expedition/Exploration.

If you have completed separate day trips to meet the Expedition/Exploration requirements for a certificate level, please select this box to submit an additional Expedition or Exploration.

Please note that at the certificate level, you are able to submit multiple, separate, Expeditions/Explorations to satisfy the day requirements. However, at the medal level, multiple trips cannot be accepted as these levels require consecutive overnight trips.

**Expedition/Exploration Additional Materials**

Choose File

Select up to 10 files to attach. No files have been attached yet. You may add 10 more files.

Acceptable file types: .csv, .doc, .docx, .odt, .pdf, .rtf, .txt, .wpd, .wpf, .gif, .jpg, .jpeg, .png, .svg, .tif, .tiff, .aac, .aiff, .flac, .m4a, .mp3, .ogg, .wav, .wma, .3gp, .avi, .flv, .m4v, .mkv, .mov, .mp4, .mpg, .webm, .wmv, .epub, .key, .mobi, .mus, .musx, .ppt, .pptx, .sib, .xls, .xlsx, .zip

You may submit photos, videos, or other documentation from your trip. This is not required.

Please see [this link](#) for an example essay, specifically the portion that requires a detailed write up of the actual trip (a day-to-day account). Please know that the example is of a Gold Medal level trip. Because of this, there are more days and detail than is required if submitting for a lower level. The example is merely for formatting guidance.

### Virtual Expedition/Exploration:

If choosing a virtual trip, please visit [this page](#) on the website for guidance into the requirements. Please see [this link](#) for an example essay. The example contains the format that we would like followed. Know that the example is of a Gold Medal level trip. Because of this, there are more activities and detail than is required if submitting for a lower level. The example is merely for formatting guidance.

Please select if you are submitting an In-Person or Virtual Expedition/Exploration. \*

☐ In-Person

☒ Virtual

Due to travel restrictions and safety concerns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, all participants will be able to submit Virtual Expeditions/Explorations with modified guidelines through January 1, 2021. Please review the Virtual Expedition/Exploration guidelines [here](#).

Please upload your Virtual Expedition/Exploration write-up. \*



Virtual\_Exp.\_Example\_Write-Up.pdf

## After You Earn Your Award



## Medals, Presentation, and Ceremonies

Congratulations! You have earned the Congressional Award! What happens next?

### The Award

Participants who have earned the Bronze, Silver, or Gold Certificate will receive it, along with their official approval letter, in the mail.

Participants who earn their Bronze or Silver Medal may choose to receive the medal, along with an official approval letter, in the mail or at their congressional district office during the presentation.

Gold Medalists are awarded Gold Medals at the annual Gold Medal Ceremony.

### Bronze and Silver Medal Presentations

Virtual Presentations are scheduled quarterly by Congressional Award staff. Participants have the opportunity to 'opt-in' for a virtual recognition ceremony with the Member of Congress from the district resided in, after having earned the Bronze or Silver Medal.

Participants can also be honored in Virtual Statewide Ceremonies.

### Gold Medal Ceremony

Every year, the Congressional Award Gold Medal Ceremony is typically held in the summertime. Participants from across the country celebrate that achievement. This event also draws in parents, advisors, validators, and school staff that have helped participants earn the Award.

## School Notification

Once an Award has been earned, the best part is sharing that achievement with others. The National Office has a template to be filled out which then allows for a letter to be generated and mailed to an Award earner's school, notifying of the achievement.

Find the template on the website: <https://www.congressionalaward.org/school-notification-form/> . It can also be found on the website under the Tab "Participants -> Current"

## Ways to Stay Connected

### LinkedIn Alumni Network

<https://www.congressionalaward.org/alumni/alumni-network/>

Alumni are encouraged to engage with the National Office at any level – as content contributors, speakers, mentors, job seekers and new Award earners.

This is a fantastic way to stay connected even after earning the Award, as it asks participants to broaden connections.

### Diversity Ambassadors

<https://www.congressionalaward.org/initiatives/diversity-ambassadors/>

In an effort to expand the reach of The Congressional Award Foundation and its mission, the National Office hopes to utilize the skills and resources of program alumni through the Diversity Ambassadors Program (CADA). The purpose of CADA is to provide outreach and support on a local level in order to ensure that The Congressional Award is both accessible to and inclusive of youth from all backgrounds.

In coordination with the National Office's Diversity and Inclusion Initiative, Ambassadors will be paramount in identifying positive pathways to reach and encourage youth participation within their own communities. Through tools and resources provided by the National Office, Ambassadors will work to further promote the program and encourage involvement among often marginalized and underrepresented youth.

To apply, simply follow this link below:

<https://www.congressionalaward.org/initiatives/diversity-ambassadors/diversity-ambassadors-application/>

Please complete the application above. Applicants will need to prepare a cover letter, resume, and brief video testimony.

### Ambassadors Blog Posts

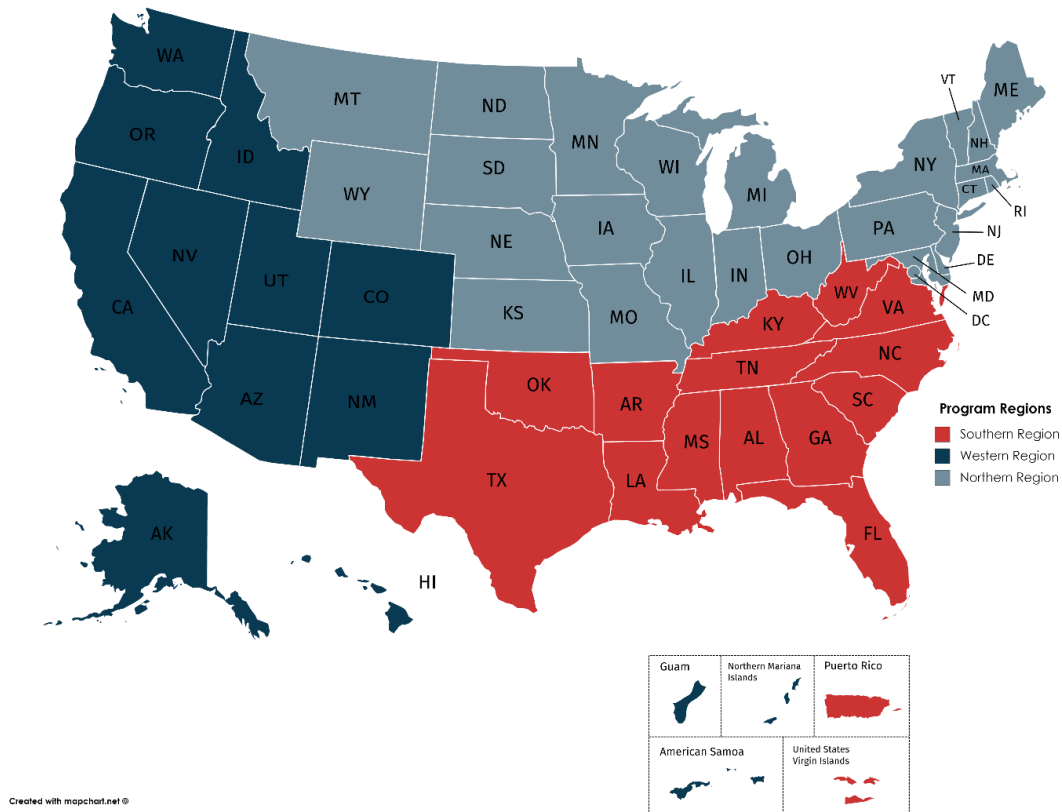
<https://www.congressionalaward.org/initiatives/diversity-ambassadors/diversity-ambassadors-blog-posts/>

### Career Center

<https://www.congressionalaward.org/initiatives/caf-career-center/>

This serves as a hub for internship and career opportunities with partners of The Congressional Award. It contains helpful marketing one-pagers for potential employers, as well as alumni highlights, and insight from experts in the business community.

Contact Us!



National Director, Erica Heyse

- [heyse@congressionalaward.org](mailto:heyse@congressionalaward.org)
  - o Director of all programing initiatives for CAF

North Program Manager, Sydney Tryon

- [tryon@congressionalaward.org](mailto:tryon@congressionalaward.org)

West Program Manager, Jordan Lindsey

- [lindsey@congressionalaward.org](mailto:lindsey@congressionalaward.org)

South Program Manager, Eric Fernandez

- [fernandez@congressionalaward.org](mailto:fernandez@congressionalaward.org)