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Congressional Award Q&A

General/ Registration

What are the age requirements?

The Congressional Award is for ANY young person who is interested in earning the Award. Young people may register when they turn 13 1/2 years old. They are eligible to submit activities starting at 14 years old and must complete their activities by their 24th birthday. Any young person under the age of 13 1/2 does not yet qualify for The Congressional Award. [Register here](#).

When can I begin counting hours toward my goals?

You may begin counting hours once you have submitted your registration and your goals have been approved by your Advisor.

Are hours accepted for work I've already completed?

No. Hours completed before you register for The Congressional Award cannot be submitted for the award. However, once you register, hours can be counted and carried to each level of the program.

What if I can complete the hours in less months than required?

When earning an award, goals achieved by activities requiring intense hours over a short period of time, e.g. 100 hours in 14 days, should be extended over the requirement for the level (for example, 7 months at the Bronze Medal level), either with follow up activities or by choosing a second goal. Part of earning a Congressional Award is making a commitment to your activities over a period of time. In order to earn an award, you must demonstrate that you have completed activities during at least the number of months required at your current level.

Can I skip levels?

You may begin with any level that you choose. We consider every participant to be on the road to the Gold Medal, and we'll give you 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. Once you're approved, we'll be sure to also send you any lower levels that you qualify for. For instance, if you choose to start with the Silver Medal level, we'll send you the Bronze Medal and all three Certificates as well. However, we strongly recommend that participants start at one of the lower levels. As the work is cumulative, the only cost will be the short time taken to fill out a Record Book and the money for postage. Plus, if you submit at a lower level, you can be sure that you understand the Congressional Award's program requirements.

Can I pursue just one of the four Program Areas?

In order to earn a Congressional Award, participants must complete hours for all four of the Program Areas. You cannot choose to pursue only certain ones. The Congressional Award program is about exploring new and different activities, thus becoming a well-rounded and balanced individual.

What if I go over the required number of hours?



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Please submit a complete Record Book that includes all of your hours for each of the Program Areas – even if you go over the minimum hour and time requirements. Remember that the minimum program requirements are just that – a minimum. All hours carry over from one level to the next, and we add them up in our database at the National Office. We want to be sure that you get credit for all hours that you accumulate throughout the program. Just remember to only list your new hours – not your total number that includes previous levels. We’ll already have that information in our database.

Can my activities with other organizations count toward The Congressional Award?

Often, they do. If you belong to groups such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Venturing, 4-H, etc., your activities may often be used to achieve a particular goal. The activities used for The Congressional Award program, however, are to be consistent with the guidelines of the Award program.

Can the time I spend at regular club meetings count toward an award?

Not usually. Hours accumulated by attending regular club meetings where regular business is discussed are unacceptable. It is the activities the club undertakes, not the meetings it holds that count toward the Award. For some goals, time invested in gaining leadership skills or planning award activities might be allowable.

Are adjustments made for persons with disabilities?

Yes. Adjustments to the requirements can be made to suit the individual needs of participants with physical or mental disabilities. However, the degree of challenge and effort required to earn the Award is not diminished.

Can a participant use the same activity in different program areas?

No. When earning the award we encourage participants to complete activities that will challenge and push them. These activities, although challenging, must be different in every area. The participant cannot complete an activity in one area and use the same activity and hours to complete in another.

How do I update my contact information for the National Office?

Please email your regional program manager if there are any updates such as address, email, or phone updates. If you need to update or change your Advisor, you can email and we are happy to make that change.

Advisors & Validators

Who would make a good Advisor or Validator?

Teachers, guidance counselors, coaches, club leaders and Scout Masters would all make excellent Advisors and Validators. The only guideline in choosing an Advisor or Validator is that they **cannot** be your parent, relative or peer.

What is a Validator?

Typically an appropriate validator is someone who has some knowledge in the participant performing or doing the activity listed for their goal. For example, if a participant has a goal related to an organized sport, a coach would make a good validator. The role of the Validator is to be a witness to the participant's growth that is dependent on their stated



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goals. They may not have to be physically there, but they should be able to help identify the participant's starting baseline and chart their activity.

Can an Advisor also serve as a Validator?

Yes, you may ask for your Advisor to sign off on their behalf, since they should be aware of a participant's activity.

Can I change my Advisor?

If you would like to change your advisor, there are two ways you can do so.

You can either send the new Advisors contact information, which includes the name, email, and phone number, to your regional program manager. You can also have your new Advisor's information put down on the new Record Book when it comes time to resubmit.

I need helping finding an Advisor, can the National Office match one for me?

No. The national office does not match participants with advisors. Advisors can be any adult who the participants have a good working relationship with, they trust, and who can act as a mentor to them in helping them set and achieve goals. This person should not be related to the participant, or a peer. Identifying and reaching out to an advisor is part of the challenge of earning a Congressional Award, so they will want to pick someone that they already know or find someone appropriate that can serve that role. Common examples include teachers, scoutmasters, counselors, coaches, family friends, neighbors, etc.

Voluntary Public Service

How many hours of indirect service may be counted towards Voluntary Public Service?

Indirect service activities such as planning, preparing, fundraising, researching, training, and organizing are limited to 25% of your overall Voluntary Public Service hour total. From our previous Covid-19 accommodations, we had waived the indirect service maximum spanning from March 2020 to December 31st 2022. Within these dates, participants may complete as many indirect service activities as they would like.

Can I log more than 8 hours of Volunteer activity per day?

Per the rules of the Program, you can only log a maximum of 8 hours of activity per goal per day. This is because the idea that you are not volunteering "in your sleep" so we only allow a maximum of 8 hours a day. Any time that goes beyond those 8 hours will be removed from a participant's Record Book and may result in a revision.

Does volunteer activity from a religious organization count?

Per the program rules and guidelines, you are not allowed to complete any activity under a religious organization/institution that involves any spreading of faith or proselytizing for your Voluntary Public Service activity. In addition, your activity submitted for Voluntary Public Service must be for the community at large and not benefit only a small group of people (for example, a church beautification project would not work since it only benefits those who go to said institution).

With that being said, you are absolutely allowed to use any religious activity for another program area, such as Personal Development. For questions about Expedition/Exploration, you are not allowed to submit a "sign-up and go" trip,



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such as mission trips that have a pre-planned itinerary. For more information, please check out the program book or our [Activities](#) web page.

How do I count hours from establishing my own 501(c)3?

For participants who are looking to create their own non-profit and use those hours for the Congressional Award, we would just need a short explanation and background on the stated goals of the non-profit and the outreach efforts.

We don't need any technical information such as IRS documentation, more just an explanation for the non-profit so we check if it may run into any of our rules and guidelines, which you can find in our program book.

I volunteer with multiple organizations, how do I log those hours for my Record Book?

A participant can volunteer at several different organizations. Part of the guidelines is that a participant may have an "Umbrella Goal", which means they can structure their goal to accommodate multiple activities that make sense together. For example, a participant can have a goal related to the environment, and have activities that include a park clean-up, tutoring about recycling.

Because there are many different validators a participant can choose, we often recommend for the Advisor to sign off, since we require a validation form to be submitted once all activity is submitted.

Expedition/Exploration

Are the days and nights for the Expeditions cumulative? Do they have to be consecutive?

At the Certificate levels, the Expedition activities are cumulative and carry over from one level to the next. However, for the Medal levels, please note that the required overnights must be consecutive. Therefore, you can not add your overnights together from previous levels.

What is the Difference between an Expedition and an Exploration?

Expeditions are typically outdoor excursions that include camping, hiking, and wilderness activities. This usually forces the participant to forgo the comforts of home and learn to pack and prepare equipment, set up a tent, and cook food over an open fire. Participants should always take safety precautions and consult an adult when necessary.

Explorations are trips that provide the participant with a new cultural experience. These may include living on a farm, traveling to a foreign country, or exploring a new environment. Explorations involve preliminary research and preparation. Challenges may include language barriers, traveling great distances, or learning new tasks. You may want to consider an overnight stay with a local family if possible.

Whether alone, or as part of a group, everyone's personal Challenge Level is different. Be sure to plan an Expedition or Exploration that's right for you.

What should I include in the write-up of my Expedition or Exploration?



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The presentation of your Record Book is very important. Be sure to provide as many details as you can, and be specific. There are three questions to consider when you are writing-up your Expedition or Exploration in the Congressional Award Record Book.

- 1) How did you prepare or plan?
- 2) How is this different from anything you have ever done before?
- 3) How were you self-reliant? Include details of how you were able to think on your feet and provide examples of how you took initiative.

The National Office Review Committee will look for this information, especially at the medal levels.

What qualifies as an Expedition or Exploration?

Expeditions and Explorations are all about adventure and discovery. Participants should plan, prepare, and be responsible. Pre-planned activities, or “Sign Up and Go” type trips would not qualify as a Congressional Award Expedition. School band trips, sport camps, conferences, cruises, leadership workshops, or competitions are examples of these pre-planned type trips that will not qualify. There are three exceptions to this rule that *may* be acceptable due to the time commitment, total immersion into a new environment and the level of physical and mental challenge required. These include:

Philmont Scout Ranch, BSA

Outward Bound

Also note that family vacations are fun and relaxing, but there must be a level of challenge and discovery involved with the trip to count as an Expedition or Exploration. All Expedition/Exploration activities are reviewed as submitted.

Virtual Exploration Accommodation

Participants are able to submit Virtual Expeditions indefinitely! Read more about the rules and guidelines [here](#), as submitting a Virtual Expedition has a different set of rules than the in-person Expedition.

On the Submittable record book, there is the Expedition section where you can choose to either submit an in-person or virtual trip. You will be able to upload your virtual Expedition there.

Do I (the participant) need to go on the Expedition alone?

For the Expedition portion, while we require participants to be in charge of the planning and prepping of a trip, this does not mean they have to go alone. Parents/Adult supervision is strongly suggested, and family trip can be accepted as long as they follow the rules/guidelines set forth by the Program. In addition, a group trip planned by multiple participants is fine as long as each participant has a strong role in planning, preparing, and executing the trip, and has their own write-up that is reflected on their own experiences.

More information can be found in the [Program Book](#), which is linked. You can also find it under our [Current Participants](#) page on our website.

What if I cannot afford an Expedition trip?

While a part of the challenge of the Congressional Award is for participants to plan, prepare, and execute a trip on their own, it does not have to be a costly trip. Participants are required to “explore outside their boundaries,” which can mean that as long as they are partaking in a brand new area they’ve never been to, that would count as an



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Expedition/Exploration. A participant may, for example, explore a part of their home state/town that they've never been to. They would still need to complete an overnight component for the Medal-level Expedition trips, so you may still need to plan for that. Participants can submit Virtual Expeditions in place of an in-person Expedition. Read more about the rules and guidelines [here](#), as submitting a Virtual Expedition has a different set of rules than the in-person Expedition.

Can I count my travel time for towards my Expedition/Exploration?

While a participant must show 6-8 hours of activity for a day to count for the Expedition/Exploration, we generally allow up to 1 full day of travel to be included. For example, if a participant submits a 5 day and 4 night Expedition, but the first day consists of all day travel (going from airport to airport, driving, etc.) that is generally fine.

Submission & Approval

How do I submit my Record Book?

Please submit your Record Book on [Submittable](#), the Award online submission website. If it's your first online record book submission, you'll need to make a Submittable account. If you have any questions, you may check out our [Submittable Support Page](#).

Sign Up and Create a Log In

Participants will need to create their own log in and password. Please use the same email for the new account that you listed on your registration form. Keep this log in for future access.

***Note:** participants were not given a log in from the Award and they must sign up to create an account.*

When is my Record Book due?

Record Books are accepted all year. There are no deadlines. Work at your own pace. Just make sure you achieve your goals by your 24th birthday. If you are interested in attending the annual Gold Medal Ceremony in Washington, DC you must submit your Gold Medal Record Book by February 1st each year.

How long does it take for a Record Book to be approved?

It may take several weeks to approve Record Books. Please be patient. Participants should hear back from their Program Manager regarding their Record Book within 4-6 weeks. Gold Medal Record Books are reviewed by a committee and take about 6-8 weeks for approval. Note – these timelines do not include turn around time if your submission needs revisions.

What if my Record Book needed revisions?

If we have any questions or need additional information, you will receive a revision notification through Submittable. Simply respond to the revision, addressing all of the points in your Submittable application.

If you add activities or hours, please make sure to have the activities approved by the Validator or Advisor.

If you do not address all of the points in a revision letter or your responses lead to additional questions, you may receive additional questions from the office.



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Please make sure to be as detailed as possible and re-review the guidelines in the [Program Book](#) to make sure you understand why you are receiving the request for additional information.

Can activities for one level of the Award be used for another level?

Yes. Everyone is on the road to the Gold Medal. Hours are carried from one level to the next. Additional hours required at each level may be spent achieving your current goals or pursuing new goals. As you move from one award level to the next, you will work with your advisor to determine the best approach for exploring your potential.

Can the National Office notify my school and/or local press that I have earned the Award?

Yes. If you fill out the [School & Press Notification Form](#) and submit it, we will notify your school and/or local press once your Record Book is approved.

What will my medal presentation be like? When will it be scheduled?

Please take a look at our [Preparing for Your Medal Presentation](#) guide for tips on how to prepare for and what to expect from your presentation.

If you requested recognition, your Member of Congress will be notified of your accomplishments, along with your contact information so that they can coordinate a form of recognition. Note that it may take several weeks or months to arrange a presentation, as Members of Congress have very packed schedules. Please be patient!

If I previously submitted with a paper Record Book, how do I submit on Submittable?

If you have been in the Award program for a while and have previously submitted Awards, you can still submit your next level online at [Submittable](#).

You do not need to re-enter your previous levels, as those levels will still be in your file. *Please only submit the new level you would like to submit for on Submittable.*

If it is your first online record book submission, you'll need to make a Submittable account, no matter if you have been registered in the program for a while. If you have any questions, you may check out our [Submittable Support Page](#).

I served in AmeriCorps NCCC and would like to continue in the program. How do I do this?

In AmeriCorps NCCC, you accumulated a lot of hours. We need to see you continue working on the three main program areas in order to meet the higher months requirements. The first thing we recommend doing is contacting us to check in and see what you need to move forward. Note – you do not need to re-register if you have already done so through your Corps term. Next, begin working on your new goals. Again, we know you accumulated a lot of hours in AmeriCorps NCCC, we need to see the continued work on your goals for the months requirement. You can find the Program Book [here](#) and should plan on completing a detailed [Submittable Record Book](#) for your next submission. You may also need to complete a new Expedition/Exploration, especially if you are aiming for the Gold Medal and you are not able to show a high level of immersion, challenge and planning from your SPIKE submission at lower levels.

Submittable FAQs



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Is Registering for a Submittable Account the same as registering for the Congressional Award?

No, Submittable is a 3rd party platform the National Office uses for participants to submit their Record Books.

For participants to begin their Congressional Award journey they must register on [this page on our website](#) and pay the \$35 registration fee or apply for a fee waiver. Once this registration form has been completed and you have received a welcome email, you are then free to make a Submittable account.

Do Not Have Access Error

Are you seeing a red error box that says you do not have access? This is a common error that we've seen participants encounter. From that error page that you have received, you may click on "View this organization's submission page" and it should take you right to the Congressional Award Record Book.

Another option is to click on the "Discover" tab, search "Congressional Award" and it should also pop up from there. With either option, you can then click the tag button on the right to save it for later.

If you have any questions, you may check out our [Submittable Support Page](#).

What does the Record Book Expiration Date mean?

Due to the nature of the Submittable platform, we must set Record Book forms to expire at the end of the calendar year. However, we will create a new Record Book form for the following year and release it on the first day of the New Year. You will then need to transfer what you've written in the previous year's Record Book into the upcoming year's Record Book.

If you have started your draft submission, but plan on submitting the following year, we **strongly encourage** for you to wait until the year you plan to submit. Please use our optional [Congressional Award Workbook](#) in the meantime to keep track and log your activities so they are not lost. We have built this tool as a planner for participants to use until they are ready to submit.

If you have any questions, you may check out our [Submittable Support Page](#).

How do I make edits to my Record Book after I've already hit submit?

Please reach out to your Program Manager via Submittable. Or you can email information@congressionalaward.org and we will open your form for editing.

If you have any questions, you may check out our [Submittable Support Page](#).

What do I do if I need to get updated validation forms?

Please reach out to your Program Manager via Submittable. Or you can email information@congressionalaward.org and we will open the validation forms for editing. Please specify what goals you need updated.

Can I send Validation forms to the same Validator?

Yes, you can. However, please be aware that they will receive multiple emails and will need to open and validate each email they receive. Please keep in mind that some inboxes like Gmail will collapse multiple emails so it will appear as one.



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Once I am approved via my first Submittable application, how do I apply for a higher level?

Once your submission has been approved, we send you an additional form. The additional form is titled “Next Congressional Award Level Record Book.” This is where you submit for a higher level of the award. If you did not receive one and would like to apply for a higher level, you can request the additional form [here](#).

If you have any questions, you may check out our [Submittable Support Page](#).

How do I locate the Additional Form in Submittable?

If you have been in the Award program for a while and have previously submitted awards, you can still submit your next level online at [Submittable](#).

You do not need to re-enter your previous levels, as those levels will still be in your file. *Please only submit for the new level on Submittable.*

1. Click “Submissions.”
2. Click on the “Accepted” Record Book that was originally approved.
3. Select “Forms.”
4. Click “Continue” on your Additional Form (It will also have your previous submission shown directly above it).

If you have any questions, you may check out our [Submittable Support Page](#).

I re-submitted my application that addresses my revisions, but my application is still showing as declined, what does this mean?

Your Program Manager must manually switch the review stage of your application. Once they have had the time to switch your application back to “In Review,” they will do so. It can take up to 2 weeks for re-submitted applications to be re-reviewed.

What is the Review Timeline for Record Books on Submittable?

The review timeline for initial record book reviews is estimated to take 4-6 weeks, or 6-8 weeks for Gold Medal submissions. Once a participant resubmits their record book, the review of revisions can take up to 2 weeks.

If you do not hear back from us within those time frames, please follow up with your regional program manager.

What if my Advisor/Validator is having issues with receiving the validation forms?

There is not very common, but a validation form will not be processed by certain email addresses, such as emails set up by school districts. In this case, we suggest that you may either send the form to your Validator’s other email address if they have one, or you may ask for your Advisor to validate on their behalf.

When you are sending multiple validation forms to your Advisor, please note that each email is uniquely generated, so if you click on the same form once it has been filled out, it will notify your Advisor.



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Please keep in mind that some inboxes like Gmail will collapse multiple emails so it will appear as one.

If you are having trouble receiving emails from Submittable, [please check out this page from their website about safe listing.](#)

How do I change or modify a Validation form when my Record Book has not been submitted yet?

We unfortunately do not have access to change/cancel/modify validation forms before a Record Book is submitted to us.

Our suggestion would be to submit your Record Book when you are ready, and reach out to your regional program manager to let them know, and we will have the validation form reopened for editing.