

Cadet Programs

THE CONGRESSIONAL AWARD

1. PURPOSE. The United States Congress established The Congressional Award to recognize initiative, achievement, and voluntary service performed by youth. Participation is voluntary, non-competitive, and self-paced. Awards are earned by achieving goals set by the participant. This pamphlet provides guidance for CAP unit commanders and their cadets who wish to pursue this recognition.

2. AWARD LEVELS. Participants progress through the awards program by earning Bronze, Silver, and Gold Congressional Award Certificates, and then Bronze, Silver, and Gold Congressional Award Medals. Participants should begin by working toward the Bronze Congressional Award Certificate, but may begin at the Bronze Medal level, or any level in between.

3. PROGRAM AREAS. To earn The Congressional Award at any level, a participant must set and achieve goals in four program areas. They are:

3.1. Volunteer Public Service. Participants provide a direct service to their community. Volunteer efforts are made without pay.

3.2. Personal Development. Participants expand their horizons by pursuing a new interest or advancing themselves in a current interest.

3.3. Physical Fitness. Participants improve their overall physical fitness through a regimen of individual exercise and/or team sports.

3.4. Expedition or Exploration. Participants develop a spirit of adventure by planning, organizing, and completing an expedition into wilderness or an exploration of a new culture. These activities are intended as one-time events.

4. PROCEDURES.

4.1. Eligibility. You are eligible to register if you are a US citizen 13½ to 23 years of age. Therefore, most cadets and even some senior members are eligible. However, you must be at least 14 to earn your first award, and you become ineligible for awards after turning 24. Activities completed before registering for The Congressional Award will not be accepted.

4.2. Registration. Complete an on-line registration form at www.congressionalaward.org, or write The Congressional Award Foundation, PO Box 77440, Washington DC, 20013. A nominal fee is required to register. The foundation will send you a Record Book and additional information. In your Record Book, specify that Civil Air Patrol is your "sponsoring organization."
NOTE: Do not send your registration form or payment to NHQ CAP.

4.3. Goal Setting. You set your own goals, with the aid of an advisor.

4.4. Goal Achievement. Work at your own pace; there are no deadlines, and work may begin immediately. Progress is recorded in a Record Book, which can be downloaded from the web at www.congressionalaward.org. Advisors and validators certify the Record Book, and then you send it to The Congressional Award Foundation, where the awards are processed.

4.5. Award Presentation. Certificates are mailed directly to the recipient. Cadets should forward the award elements to their unit commander, who will arrange an appropriate presentation ceremony. Medals are presented by Members of Congress in ceremonies coordinated by The Congressional Award Foundation.

4.6. Advancement. After earning an award, you may advance to the next level, and ultimately become eligible for the highest award, The Congressional Award Gold Medal. Each level is cumulative; time spent working on one award is carried over to the next level.

5. ADVISORS AND VALIDATORS.

5.1. The advisor assists you in studying the program's rules, reviewing the Record Book, developing goal statements, and choosing activities to accomplish your goals. The advisor can help you find another knowledgeable adult to serve as validator. CAP senior members may act as advisors. You may keep the same advisor throughout your time spent working toward Congressional Awards.

5.2. The validator certifies that you satisfactorily perform the activities and signs the Record Book confirming that your goal(s) was achieved. The validator should be knowledgeable in the activities related to your goals, so you will probably not want to use the same validator all the time. Validators discuss the specific requirements for the goal, including how progress will be measured or documented. Validators share their expertise to help make the goal achievable, worthwhile, and fulfilling. An advisor may also act as a validator. CAP senior members may act as validators.

5.3. You may not use one of your relatives, a cadet, or a fellow student or peer to serve as an advisor or validator.

6. GUIDANCE FOR DETERMINING GOALS.

6.1. Criteria. The participants determine goals, but they must be (1) achievable, (2) worthwhile, (3) measurable, (4) challenging, and (5) fulfilling.

6.2. Records. List your goals in the Record Book. Make them objective: Include specifics, avoid generalities. Goals should be measurable. Write them so that it will be easy to tell if they have been achieved or not. Goals can be added or revised with the approval of your advisor.

6.3. Constraints.

6.3.1. Activities pursued as a member of CAP (or through other civic groups, school clubs, or religious organizations) must provide a direct service to the community to count toward a Congressional Award's Volunteer Public Service program area. Work related to the internal business or normal duties of CAP membership is ineligible. For example, attending weekly squadron meetings, serving as a CAC representative, and organizing an open house does not qualify. However, community service performed through CAP is eligible. For example, hosting a

model rocketry event for Cub Scouts, or assisting at a Red Cross blood drive would meet the requirements.

6.3.2. Activities completed in pursuit of a goal can be competitive, but the goal itself cannot. For example, "I will be selected as cadet commander" is not an acceptable goal. To achieve it you must compete against other cadets and someone other than yourself determines if you will be selected or not. However, "I will improve my basketball skills so that my free-throw percentage will increase from 35 to 45 percent" is an acceptable goal. The game of basketball is competitive, yet the actual goal is not -- how well you shoot free throws is up to you.

6.3.3. For an Expedition or Exploration, the planning must be done by the participant. Therefore, attending a national cadet activity or encampment would not qualify. Further, hosting a bivouac to teach wilderness skills to others does not meet the criteria because that involves demonstrating skills you already have, not engaging in a new experience or discovery. However, if you plan and complete an overnight backpacking trip, that would qualify because you would be the one undertaking a new adventure. Participants must be self-supporting and self-sufficient, but a senior member or other adult must oversee the venture. The Silver and Gold Medal Expeditions / Explorations require consecutive overnights in the field.

6.3.4. Participants have wide latitude in setting goals for the Personal Development program area. Advancing your leadership abilities by participating in a seminar, or completing a brief internship in an interesting career field qualifies as a Personal Development goal. Part-time employment may also be eligible. For example, working at an airport to advance your knowledge of aviation is an appropriate Personal Development goal.

6.3.5. Schoolwork, and activities done for school credit, may not be applied towards a Congressional Award.

6.3.6. Cadet Protection. If participation in CAP activities is used in pursuing The Congressional Award, all CAP directives, including the Cadet Protection Policy, must be followed.

7. PRESENTATION OF AWARDS.

7.1. Congressional Award Certificates may be presented at CAP functions. Bronze and Silver Certificates may be presented by unit commanders or the wing director of cadet programs. Gold Certificates should be presented by the group commander (or higher), or a state or federal government official.

7.2. Congressional Award Medals are awarded by Members of Congress. Gold Medals are presented annually by Congressional leaders at a ceremony in the US Capitol.

7.3. Unit commanders should recognize members who earn Congressional Awards through local media and The CAP News. If a cadet qualifies for the Congressional Award Gold Medal, the squadron commander must notify NHQ CAP at (334) 227-9142 ext 410 or via email at cadets@capnhq.gov.

7.4. Uniforms. Cadets may wear the CAP blue Air Force-style uniform when receiving a Congressional Award. If the CAP uniform is worn, it must be worn in accordance with CAPM 39-1, CAP Uniform Manual. Congressional Award medals may be worn on the uniform during the presentation ceremony only