



**Military Family**  
Advisory Network



# **The Congressional Award**



## **A Guide for Military Youths**

## The Congressional Award: A Guide for Military Youths



**38,000+**  
young people working to earn a  
Congressional Award

**7.4 million**  
hours of public service total

**535**  
members of Congress  
recognizing, promoting, and  
delivering the program



### Why Military Kids?

Military life has unique challenges, especially for the children of those who serve. Still, these young people find ways to adapt and thrive, even though they can experience high levels of instability due to frequent moves and their parents' deployments.

Open to Americans ages 14 to 24, regardless of physical or developmental disabilities, the Congressional Award program is particularly valuable for military youth:

- ★ It gives youths the opportunity to expand their knowledge and experience in four program areas while earning recognition from Congress.
- ★ It provides continuity and eases transitions caused by a family PCS or a parent's separation from the military.
- ★ It accommodates the military lifestyle because participants can choose among the program's six levels, each with its own requirements and time commitments.

### What is the Congressional Award?

The Congressional Award is a public-private partnership created by Congress to promote and recognize the achievements of young Americans, no matter where they live.



### Why participate in the Congressional Award program?

The Congressional Award program helps military youths become independent, strong, and caring community leaders.

The characteristics of military youths — including strong community ties, social skills, and resilience — are reinforced through volunteerism.

The Congressional Award program offers opportunities for military youths to volunteer and to gain the support of a mentor who provides additional stability in their lives.

### Leadership Through Service:

#### One military youth's experience earning the Congressional Award

"I owe a great deal of who I am today to the program," said Ashley Eisert, an Air Force daughter and 2010 Congressional Award Gold Medalist. "Each program area challenged me to grow as an individual and an emerging mentor for others. I learned that every challenge can be overcome by surrounding oneself with mentors, advisors, family, friends, and those who can share life lessons."

The interests Ashley explored as part of the program included Girl Scouts, fencing, roller skating, and camping. She also served as a summer school paraprofessional and traveled to England and France to study European history. She described her Congressional Award experience as a series of stepping stones that led her to discover her academic, professional, and personal life goals. Ashley is now studying business administration at the University of Nebraska Omaha.

The Congressional Award runs in the Eisert family; Ashley's younger siblings, Brianna and Andrew, also earned the Gold Medal. It is important to Ashley and her family that military youths know about the Congressional Award and understand how it can prepare them for many of life's challenges. By earning the Gold Medal, Ashley gained valuable leadership skills, made new friends and connections, and, above all, grew into a confident adult ready to take on any challenge before her.

*"I learned that every challenge can be overcome by surrounding oneself with mentors, advisors, family, friends, and those who can share life lessons."*

—Ashley Eisert

### The Military Family Advisory Network (MFAN)

MFAN is a 501(c)(3) dedicated to building a community of military and veteran families at home and abroad who are well-informed about resources designed to serve them; equipped with tools for success; connected to leaders who serve the military family community; and embraced by the general public.

We translate the needs of military families in a way that service providers can understand, and translate services in a way that speaks to our families.

To learn more about MFAN, visit [militaryfamilyadvisorynetwork.org](https://militaryfamilyadvisorynetwork.org)

If you have questions, email [info@militaryfamilyadvisorynetwork.org](mailto:info@militaryfamilyadvisorynetwork.org)



## Program Benefits

### Why earn the Congressional Award?

Promoting positive mental and emotional health is especially beneficial for military youths, many of whom experience high levels of instability due to frequent moves and their parents' deployments. The Congressional Award provides participants, no matter where they live, with a structured, yet flexible, platform to achieve personal goals.

- ★ The program is open to Americans ages 14 to 24, including those with physical or developmental disabilities. Interested youths can register when they are 13½.
- ★ Participants craft an individual achievement plan based on their personal goals.
- ★ The program offers six levels, with varying requirements and time commitments, providing built-in flexibility to accommodate the military lifestyle.
- ★ Military youths in the program may continue to participate even if they move or their parent separates from the military.
- ★ Involvement in the program can help set participants apart on college and job applications because it shows commitment to service and personal development.

Earning the Congressional Award can open many doors, academically and professionally. It empowers participants to take responsibility, discover new talents, and advocate for others.

To learn more about the benefits of earning the Congressional Award, visit [congressionalaward.org](http://congressionalaward.org).



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**@Mil\_FANet  
@theaward**



## Program Requirements

Participating in the Congressional Award program enables military youths to set and achieve personally challenging goals. The Congressional Award is dedicated to the empowerment of young people through:

- ★ **Voluntary Public Service**
- ★ **Personal Development**
- ★ **Physical Fitness**
- ★ **Expedition/Exploration**

Through these four program areas, the Congressional Award offers young Americans the opportunity to develop leadership, citizenship, and planning skills. The timeline for each of the six award levels is flexible, and there is only one deadline: Participants must complete the activity to earn the award before their 24th birthday.

### Award Levels

#### Certificates:

- ★ Gold
- ★ Silver
- ★ Bronze

#### Medals:

- ★ Gold
- ★ Silver
- ★ Bronze



The Congressional Award is a great opportunity for military youths to get involved in their communities and work toward goals that matter to them — and they can participate no matter where they live or if they move.

For a closer look at the program requirements, download the program book at [congressionalaward.org](http://congressionalaward.org).





## Fast Facts

### What is the Congressional Award?

The Congressional Award is a public-private partnership created by Congress to promote and recognize the achievements of young Americans, no matter where they live.

### What are the age requirements?

Those interested in the program can register when they are 13½ and can begin working on their activities when they turn 14. They must complete the program by their 24th birthday. To view the full list of program requirements, visit [congressionalaward.org](https://congressionalaward.org).

### Are there any limitations other than age?

The Congressional Award is open to all young Americans, regardless of physical or developmental disability.

### What if my family PCS's or separates from the military? Can I still participate?

Yes. One of the significant benefits of the Congressional Award is its flexibility — one of the key reasons that we at MFAN believe it's a great match for military families. To ease the transition, find an advisor and a validator in your new area to continue working toward your goals.

### How do I find an advisor, and what are his or her responsibilities?

Advisors are adults who help participants set challenging goals and assist them as they complete their record book. Teachers, coaches, neighbors, club sponsors, and civic leaders all make excellent advisors. To learn more about the advisor's role and responsibilities, visit [congressionalaward.org](https://congressionalaward.org).



### How do I find a validator, and what are his or her responsibilities?

Validators are adults who assist participants with individual activities. Participants should have multiple validators, and each one should be knowledgeable about the activities participants pursue to achieve a particular goal. To learn more about the validator's role and responsibilities, visit [congressionalaward.org](https://congressionalaward.org).

### Where can I find opportunities to fulfill the requirements for my goals?

Visit [congressionalaward.org](https://congressionalaward.org) to find opportunities to fulfill the following program areas:

- ★ **Voluntary Public Service**
- ★ **Personal Development**
- ★ **Physical Fitness**
- ★ **Expedition/Exploration**

### How do I get my award?

Members of the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate honor youths who earn bronze, silver, and gold certificates and bronze and silver medals. Gold medalists attend the Congressional Award Gold Medal Ceremony at the U.S. Capitol.

### What are the benefits of completing the program?

Involvement in the Congressional Award program can set participants apart on college and job applications because it shows commitment to service and personal development.

### Where can I find more information?

For information on MFAN's partnership with the Congressional Award, visit [militaryfamilyadvisorynetwork.org](https://militaryfamilyadvisorynetwork.org).

To register for the Congressional Award, visit [congressionalaward.org](https://congressionalaward.org).



USAA is pleased to support the Military Family Advisory Network in the creation and distribution of this military youth toolkit for the Congressional Award Program. Promoting positive mental and emotional health is especially beneficial for military children, many of whom experience high levels of instability due to frequent moves and their parents' deployments. The Congressional Award provides military youth, no matter where they live, with a structured, yet flexible, platform to achieve personal goals. The USAA family of companies provides insurance, banking, investments, retirement products and advice to 10.9 million current and former members of the U.S. military and their families. Known for its legendary commitment to its members, USAA is consistently recognized for outstanding service, employee well-being and financial strength.



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