

# Congressional Award Scouts Can Earn

In Congress, it's the rare subject about which there's unanimous agreement.

It's the Congressional Award, the highest recognition Congress bestows on young people. To qualify, a young person must meet certain goals in four key areas: voluntary public service, personal development, physical fitness and expedition/exploration.

Are you thinking what I'm thinking? Yes, many of the activities young people enjoy in Scouting fit nicely into those four categories. Better yet, double-dipping is encouraged, meaning work on merit badges, rank requirements and Eagle projects counts toward the award.

This natural correlation explains why, in 1999, the BSA became partners with the Congressional Award Foundation, which remains Congress' only charity.

As jobs and colleges become increasingly more competitive, the Congressional Award – along with a young person's experience in Scouting – will look great on a résumé. That “something extra” is exactly what hiring managers and college admissions counselors want to see.

Scouts have been earning the Congressional Award ever since it was established in 1979. In 2019, at **least 75 of the 538 Congressional Award Gold Medal recipients were Scouts**. But I say it's time to raise that number even higher. The award is noncompetitive, meaning anyone who properly completes the requirements will receive the award.

## **Important: Scouts must register first**

Before you consider retroactively counting Scouting experience toward the award, let me point out one key statement from the Congressional Award site: “This is not an award for past accomplishments. Instead, you are honored for achieving your own challenging goals after registering for the program.”

That means your Scouts should register for the award as soon as possible after turning 13.5 years old, giving them the maximum amount of time to count Scouting requirements toward their progress.

But even if your Scout or Venturer is 16, 17 or older, all hope is not lost. They have until their 24th birthday to complete the requirements.

### **‘Things I was already doing in Scouting’**

After registering, any qualifying activity – in school, Scouting or another extracurricular activity – can count toward the award. That fact is confirmed in the award’s FAQs: “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.”

That was certainly the case for Eagle Scout Todd Christian, who earned the Congressional Award in 2019, at age 23.

“I completed all of the requirements for the program exclusively through the things I was already doing through Scouting,” he says.

Christian earned the Gold Medal, which is the highest of the Congressional Award’s six levels. That top honor includes an invite to the national award ceremony in Washington, D.C., where honorees meet other recipients as well as their congressional representatives. (Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, this year’s ceremony was held virtually.)

The Gold Medal requires at least 400 hours of volunteer time, 200 hours of personal development, 200 hours of physical fitness, and an expedition of at least five days and four nights.

“Essentially, anyone who completes a multiday trek as well as a comprehensive service project – what we call an Eagle project – has already overcome a major hurdle to receiving the top award,” Christian says.

The entry-level award – the Bronze Certificate – is within even closer reach for most Scouts. It requires 30 hours of volunteer service, 15 hours of personal development, 15 hours of physical fitness, and a one-day expedition or exploration.

“Virtually every Scout has met these requirements many times over, just by being a Scout,” Christian says.

Learn more about the program and how you can earn your award.

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