Issue Overview for Congressional Gold Medal

Significance of the Congressional Gold Medal

The Congressional Gold Medal (CGM) will be a significant national honor to promote the mission and goals of the Peace Corps and all partner organizations who support the success of the Peace Corps. The congressional bill and award of the CGM to tens of thousands of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) and current Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) will educate our national leaders, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), citizens of our nation, and host country program directors about the values of Peace Corps service. Such recognition will be helpful in passing the latest version of the Peace Corps Reauthorization Act and an acceptable Peace Corps budget. The CGM will also highlight the legacy of President Kennedy, Sargent Shriver, RPCVs, PCVs, and Peace Corps staff for their historic contributions to world peace and friendship. The draft bill is designed to be a bipartisan document to show support for Peace Corps programs from both political parties in Congress.

The CGM is proposed to cover the Peace Corps' 65 years of service from August 28, 1961 (when the first PCVs departed for Ghana) through December 31, 2026 (the final day of the 65th anniversary year for the Peace Corps). The CGM will be an important recruitment tool for new PCVs – a significant focus of the Agency today. Peace Corps recruitment could be aided by communication of amazing RPCV stories at celebration events across the country or in the media to honor those women and men who deserve to be recognized for their unselfish service to the world.

The CGM, described in Congressional Research Service Report No. 45101,[1] should not be confused with the Medal of Honor.[2] The main differences between the two award are as follows:

a. The **Congressional Gold Medal** is the oldest and highest civilian award in the United States, alongside the Presidential Medal of Freedom. It is bestowed by a vote of the United States Congress. The CGM expresses the highest national appreciation for distinguished achievements and contributions by individuals, groups, or institutions.[3]

b. The **Medal of Honor** is the United States Armed Forces' highest military honor and is awarded to recognize American soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, guardians, and coast guardsmen who have distinguished themselves by acts of valor. The Medal of Honor is normally awarded by the president of the United States (the commander in chief of the armed forces) and is presented "in the name of the United States Congress." It is often colloquially (but technically incorrectly) referred to as the Congressional Medal of Honor.[4]

---

[1] Congressional Research Service, Congressional Gold Medals: Background, Legislative Process, and Issues for Congress Updated July 18, 2024; https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45101.
[2] Congressional Medal of Honor Society; https://www.cmohs.org/.
[3] Wikipedia, Congressional Gold Medal; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congressional_Gold_Medal.
[4] Wikipedia, Medal of Honor; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medal_of_Honor.

Supporting Information

The following information includes a description and rationale of initial recommendations for consideration in the development of the CGM. Additional issues and actions may be identified by strategic partners, congressional staff, or the Peace Corps to finalize the bill and the distribution of the CGM to RPCVs and PCVs.

1. The 65th anniversary of the Peace Corps in 2026 coincides with the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. There will be numerous celebrations for the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence across the United States. Organizing award events across our country and overseas, for the 65th anniversary of the Peace Corps and the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, could be goals of Congress, the Peace Corps, and other strategic partners who support the Peace Corps.

2. Some RPCVs that served in the 1960s are in their 80s or older by now. Congress should act expeditiously on the CGM so all valued members of the Peace Corps family can appreciate the honor of the award in their lifetimes. An RPCV said that the CGM should be finalized soon so she can receive the award before she dies. Time is of the essence as RPCVs age, and there is a significant concern for the time it may take to pass the CGM bill. Coordination with congressional staff will be needed to promote the bill, with letters of support from strategic partners that support the Peace Corps.

3. The initial proposal for a CGM was published in the National Peace Corps Association's (NPCA) WorldView magazine in the Winter 2023/2024 edition. The article is titled "Heavy Medal."[5] In an April 1, 2024 email, Robert Nolan, NPCA's editor for WorldView magazine said, "I asked readers to weigh in on whether or not Peace Corps Vols should get a CGM in the last email for WorldView. Almost 60 people wrote in! Most fully supported the idea. Thought you'd like to know!" On April 15, 2024, Mr. Nolan provided a list of 44 emails with comments about the CGM and the "Heavy Medal" article. About 86% of the respondents agreed that a CGM is warranted; however, about 14% did not feel the CGM was necessary. The larger percentage of responses supporting the idea of a CGM is a good indicator of the acceptance of the proposal for a prestigious award.

4. Thanking RPCVs and PCVs for their service was an important point raised in the comments on "Heavy Medal" and in discussions about the CGM. In addition, the sacrifices that Volunteers made on many levels while in service are also important reasons to thank them for their service. Section 2, paragraphs 13 and 15 of the draft bill for the CGM addresses the need to thank RPCVs and PCVs for their service when public events are scheduled, or in person when someone meets an RPCV or a PCV. Paragraph 14 in the draft bill is a testimony to the Peace Corps' successful evacuation of 7,000 PCVs during the 2019 COVID pandemic. Thanking RPCVs or currently serving PCVs for her or his service would be similar to thanking a military veteran for her or his service. The important differences between Peace Corps service and military service should be maintained to ensure that military veterans are not disrespected for their service to the United States.

---

[5] Patrick Cotter and Duff Devine, Heavy Medal, Worldview Magazine, Winter 2023-2024 issue; https://www.peacecorpsconnect.org/heavy-medal/.

5. There are two congressional caucuses that deal with national volunteer service groups. The first caucus is the Congressional Peace Corps Caucus.[6] Rep. John Garamendi is a co-chairman of the Peace Corps Caucus for the 118th Congress. The second caucus is the National Service Congressional Caucus[7]. Undoubtedly, the composition of these two caucuses will change after the 2024 elections. The co-chairs of each caucus should be contacted to evaluate the possibility of supporting the draft CGM bill.

6. During a July 12, 2024 meeting with Rep. Jimmy Panetta to discuss his support for the Peace Corps, he recommended that the proposal for a CGM should be coordinated with Rep. Garamendi.

7. In a related action, Rep. Garamendi authored the bill for a CGM to honor U.S. Merchant Marine WWII veterans that was successfully signed into law on March 13, 2020.[8] As a result of that successful law-making process, Rep. Garamendi and his staff are familiar with what needs to be done to promote a CGM bill for RPCVs and PCVs. A draft of the CGM bill was provided to Rep. Garamendi during a meeting with the National Peace Corps Association's staff. The staff appreciated the draft bill, but end of year work in Congress took precedence over action on the draft CGM bill.

8. The draft bill includes bipartisan examples of senior U.S. Government leaders who supported the Peace Corps in Section 2 - Findings. The bipartisan scope of the draft CGM bill should be maintained to ensure that sufficient support is obtained for the draft bill to pass both Houses of Congress and receive needed support from both political parties in Congress.

9. The Peace Corps was contacted by email in early 2023 about an idea for a CGM for RPCVs. In 2023, Andrew Wilson, the Peace Corps' Director of the Office of Third Goal and Returned Volunteer Services, gave a positive response to the idea for CGM recognition. However, he said the Agency is not able to lobby Congress.

10. Contact through online communication should be initiated with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that traditionally support the Peace Corps, notable RPCVs[9] and private citizens, and others known to NPCA or the Peace Corps who could provide documented support for the proposed CGM bill. According to the Peace Corps' website, strategic partners that work with the Peace Corps include:
    - Nonprofits
    - Corporations and businesses
    - Federal agencies
    - State and local governments and tribal nations
    - International organizations

---

[6] 118th Congress Congressional Member Organizations (CMOs), Updated 06/17/24, page 61; https://cha.house.gov/_cache/files/6/1/61c07041-aeed-477a-abe3-20ffd7b4585b/46305825AB54DEB6D10964D4BBB5B27F.cmo-list-2.9-16-.pdf.

[7] National Service Congressional Caucus; https://voicesforservice.org/policy-corner/national-service-congressional-caucus/.

[8] Public Law 116-125, https://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/116/125.pdf.

[9] Wikipedia, List of Peace Corps volunteers; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Peace_Corps_volunteers.

- Philanthropic institutions
- Academic institutions[10]

12. To estimate the monetary value of Peace Corps Volunteers' contributions, we can calculate the equivalent earnings volunteers were paid using the current Federal minimum wage for their service and a work schedule of 40 hours a week.

    Assumptions:
    - Number of RPCVs (projected for 2026) = 250,000 RPCVs
    - Duration of Training = 3 months or 0.25 years[11]
    - Duration of Service = 24 months or 2 years
    - Work Hours per Week = 40 hours/week
    - Weeks per Year = 52 weeks/year
    - Federal Minimum Wage (as of 1968) = $7.25/hour

    Calculations:
    - Work Hours per Year = (Work Hours per Week) x (Weeks per Year) = 2,080 hours/year
    - Work Hours Served = (2.25 Years) x (Work Hours per Year) = 4,680 hours served
    - Gross Earnings per Volunteer = (Work Hours Served) x (Minimum Wage) = $33,930
    - Dollar Value for Work of All Volunteers = (Volunteers) × (Gross Earnings) = **$8,482,500**

    Therefore, if each of the projected 250,000 Peace Corps Volunteers had been compensated at the Federal minimum wage for their 27 months of service, the total monetary value of their contributions would be approximately $8.49 billion. This calculation provides a conservative quantitative perspective for salaries based on the substantial impact of Peace Corps Volunteers' service worldwide. The calculation does not include the value of PCVs working in-service as of December 31, 2026.

    The figure of $8.49 billion is probably an underestimate of Volunteers' time, value, and positive influences for their host countries and the United States of America, given the undeniable success of the Peace Corps' programs. The actual value of Volunteers' time and service is likely one or two orders of magnitude more than the calculated dollar value presented above.

13. If criteria are required to issue duplicate copies of the CGM to RPCVs, PCVs, or their families, congressional staff and the Peace Corps may need to recommend draft criteria. If needed, criteria for awarding a CGM to Volunteers who served during the dates listed in Section 2, paragraph 3 of the draft bill could be the following:

    a. A Volunteer who earned a Completion of Service record from the United States Peace Corps,

[10] U.S. Peace Corps, Our Strategic Partners; https://www.peacecorps.gov/about-the-agency/partners/.
[11] Peace Corps Volunteer Service; https://www.peacecorps.gov/ways-to-serve/serve-with-us/.

b. Evacuation of a Volunteer by the United States Peace Corps for circumstances beyond the control of a Volunteer, as determined by the Agency, or

c. Volunteers actively serving in their host country up to and including December 31, 2026.

d. Other criteria could be developed or edited, as needed.

14. Experience with U.S. Merchant Marine CGM distribution program has been contact with Katrina McRae at the U.S. Maritime Administration (MARAD). She has been helpful in sending medals to U.S. Merchant Marine WWII veterans and their families. The MARAD website has information on the medal.[12] The specific application requirements or criteria for MARAD to issue the 2020 Merchant Marine CGM are:

    "The Merchant Mariners of World War II CGM Act of 2020 authorizes MARAD to award duplicates of the medal to individuals who, between December 7, 1941, and December 31, 1946, were members of the United States Merchant Marine, or other related services. If a qualified individual has passed, MARAD is authorized to issue medals to the next of kin. To request a duplicate medal, veterans or their family members or survivors can submit:

    a. A copy of the Merchant Mariner's DD Form 214, "Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active duty" with continuation ship if provided (the DD Form 214 is required to verify Merchant Marine service on vessels during World War II);

    b. A summary, if available, of World War II sailing history to include the theater(s) of operation and ports of discharge; and

    c. Book number or United States Maritime Service (USMS) number, if available.

    Inquiries, along with the required documents, can be emailed to Katrina McRae, Maritime Awards Officer, at katrina.mcrae@dot.gov."

15. The cost of designing, striking and producing the original CGM is charged by the Department of the Treasury's U.S. Mint.[13] Current charges will have to be confirmed by contacting representatives at the U.S. Mint. In the past, costs for the original CGM process were $30,000 or more, depending on the work involved. Covering the costs of producing the original CGM can be discussed with the congressional staff working on the bill.

16. It may take many months to have the original CGM ready for the initial award ceremony at the Capitol Rotunda or another appropriate location to honor the recipients. In the draft bill, Section 5 - Sense of Congress, Congress could request that the U.S. Mint expedite action to design and strike the CGM. Maintaining contact with the U.S. Mint and congressional staff will be necessary to ensure that the CGM can be awarded in 2026 for the 65th anniversary of the Peace Corps and the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

---

[12] U.S. Department of Transportation, U.S. Maritime Administration, Mariner Medals; https://www.maritime.dot.gov/outreach/mariner-medals.
[13] U.S. Mint, Medals; https://catalog.usmint.gov/shop/medals/.

17. The costs of duplicate medals made of bronze will be charged by the U.S. Mint. As of September 30, 2024, the following costs are provided on the U.S. Mint's website.[14]

    a. A 3" diameter bronze medal = $160.00 each.

    b. An optional black presentation case for the 3" diameter bronze medal = $35.00, otherwise the medal is mailed in a protective plastic cover.

    c. A 1.5" diameter bronze medal = $20.00 each.

    d. An optional black presentation case for the 1.5" bronze medal = $16.00 each, otherwise the medal is mailed in a protective plastic cover.

    e. A one-to-two-week shipping and handling fee = $5.95 for each order.

18. In the updated draft bill, there are no congressional appropriated costs for the U.S. Mint, duplicate medals, presentation boxes, or shipping fees. Consultation should be initiated with the congressional staff about such an appropriation or contact the Peace Corps about managing the distribution process. Fundraising could be considered to help with the costs of duplicate medals that are not covered.

19. If Congress does not appropriate funds to cover the costs of the medal awards for all RPCVs or PCVs that meet the appropriate criteria, the CGMs can be purchased by individuals or families directly from the U.S. Mint because they are "Numismatic Items" under Section 7 - Determination of Budgetary Effects of the draft bill. Funds to cover the cost of distributing the medals should be discussed with congressional staff and the Peace Corps.

20. If the bill is successful, a discussion with congressional staff and the Peace Corps could help plan for a distribution and award ceremony program in 2026 to coincide with celebrations of the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

# # # # #

[14] U.S. Mint, Historical Event Medals; https://catalog.usmint.gov/medals/historical-events/.