



Sovereign's Medal For Volunteers Frequently Asked Questions



What is the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers?

The Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers (SMVol) is a national award that recognizes the volunteer achievements of Canadians from across the country in a wide range of fields. It is the highest honour for volunteer service that an individual can receive within the Canadian Honours System.

The SMVol program was created in 2016 to replace its predecessor, the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award (CCA), conceived in 1995 by then-Governor General the Right Honourable Roméo LeBlanc. The Medal builds on the legacy and spirit of the CCA by honouring the dedication and commitment of volunteers.

Who is eligible to be recognized?

1. Any **living Canadian citizen** who has made unpaid, sustained and significant volunteer contributions to their community **in Canada or abroad**.
2. **Living non-Canadians** whose volunteer contributions have **brought benefit or honour to Canadians or to Canada**.

What are the three eligibility criteria for the Medal?

Nominees should be dedicated and committed volunteers whose volunteer contributions are:

1. **Unpaid**
2. **Sustained**
3. **Significant**

What qualifies as unpaid volunteer work?

Unpaid work means quite simply that the nominee must **not have received any financial compensation** for the volunteer efforts being considered for a Medal. **All volunteer contributions listed on the nomination form must be 100% unpaid**. The following **do not meet the unpaid eligibility criteria** and should not be included in the submission:

- Officers working with the Cadet Instructor Cadre (CIC), because they are paid 25 to 35 days a year.

- Caring for a foster child or foster animal, because foster parents are remunerated for their services.
- Volunteers with sending organizations such as Médecins Sans Frontières, Canadian University Students Overseas (CUSO) and Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), as these individuals receive stipends and a living allowance.
- Volunteer activities that are too closely related to paid employment or done with the primary purpose of promoting one's paid employment.

For example, teachers are generally expected to participate in extracurricular activities as part of their job. Therefore, for nominees whose paid profession is teaching, the eligible volunteer work would need to be with organizations outside of the school where they are employed.

What qualifies as sustained volunteer work?

Sustained work is generally defined as **approximately 10 years of volunteer service over the nominee's lifetime**. This service can be with one or more organizations spread out over several years.

The following guidelines are used:

Impact refers to the depth of the nominee's contribution. Has the nominee identified and addressed a priority in their community? Describe how their contributions have made a lasting difference in the community. Indicate how the nominee has made their work sustainable (in other words, how will the benefits of the nominee's contributions continue when the nominee is no longer involved).

Reach describes who benefited from the nominee's contributions (i.e., individuals and/or specific groups). Indicate how many people were affected and how they were affected. Have the contributions expanded to benefit other people or groups? Have they expanded beyond the nominee's community, locally or nationally?

- If a nominee has **less than 10 years** of total volunteer service, they may still be eligible for the Medal. The **impact** and **reach** of their volunteer contributions and the nominee's **age** will be assessed.
- Nominees with **less than 3 years** of volunteer experience **generally would not meet the sustained criteria**.

According to the SMVol program regulations, a nominee must show at least one instance of volunteer work **after 2009** for the nomination to be considered.

Nominators must submit the years of service for each volunteer organization (i.e., from what year to what year).

The frequency of the service with each volunteer organization should also be included (e.g., 2 hours/week, 1 day/week, 1 day/month, 1 weekend/year).

The total number of hours is not necessary.

What qualifies as significant volunteer work?

Significant volunteer work is work which has made a lasting, positive impact to the greater community and which brings honour to Canada.

To clarify this criterion, it may help to look at some examples of volunteer efforts that do not qualify. The following contributions **do not meet the significant eligibility criterion** and should **not** be included in a submission:

- Service club membership without evidence of a contribution to the wider community (i.e., a nominee needs to serve as a volunteer with the organization and not just be a member of the organization)
- Blood donations
- Financial donations
- Caring for a family member
- Volunteer work in the community related to high school or other educational requirements (i.e., for those under 18 years of age).

Can I nominate someone who has already received an official honour from the Governor General?

Yes. However, the nominee would not be eligible for the SMVol if they have already received an honour in recognition of the same volunteer efforts being considered.

Canadian honours policy prohibits the awarding of more than one honour in recognition of the same achievement, a practice frequently referred to as

duplicate recognition. An official honour is an order, decoration or medal that forms part of Canada's Order of Precedence.

This policy on duplicate recognition applies to the following types of nominees:

- Officers with the Cadet Instructor Cadre (CIC), as they are eligible to receive the Canadian Decoration (CD)
- St. John Ambulance volunteers, as they are eligible to receive the Order of St. John
- Volunteer firefighters, as they are eligible to receive the Fire Services Exemplary Service Medal.

How can I nominate an officer with the Cadet Instructor Cadre (CIC) for recognition?

If you would like to nominate a paid CIC officer who has volunteer achievements outside of their work with the cadets, your SMVol nomination should **not** reference their work with cadets among their volunteer achievements.

How can I nominate a volunteer with St. John Ambulance (SJA) for recognition?

If you would like to recognize a volunteer who serves with SJA, you should contact a nominating authority for the Order of St. John, such as the Chancellor, Deputy Chancellery, Priory Secretary or Provincial/Territorial Council Chair and suggest that a nomination be submitted.

The Canadian Honours System recognizes volunteer work with SJA with the Order of St. John. To be admitted to the Order of St. John, nominees must display, among other things, sustained involvement and volunteer service with SJA.

If you would like to nominate a volunteer with SJA who has volunteer achievements outside of volunteering with SJA, your SMVol nomination should **not** include information about their volunteer service with SJA.

How can I nominate a volunteer firefighter for recognition?

If you would like to recognize a volunteer firefighter, you should contact a nominating authority for the Fire Services Exemplary Service Medal

(FSESM), such as the local fire chief, deputy fire chief, mayor or city clerk and suggest that a FSESM nomination be submitted. The Chancellery can assist you in determining the point of contact in such cases.

The Canadian Honours System recognizes service as a volunteer firefighter with the FSESM, which is awarded in recognition of 20 years of service, characterized by good conduct, industry and efficiency.

If you wish to nominate a firefighter with volunteer achievements beyond firefighting, your SMVol nomination should **not** include information about their work as a volunteer firefighter.

Do I have to know the person I nominate?

Yes, you must be directly aware of the volunteer contributions made by the individual you wish to nominate. You must know them well enough to be able to provide us with their contact information and details of their volunteer work.

Can nominations be made for someone's political or public advocacy volunteer work?

No. Political and public advocacy work is not eligible and will not be considered.

Volunteer contributions that occurred during the years that a nominee held an elected office at the municipal, provincial or federal level will not be considered; however, volunteer work outside their years in office will be considered.

Can the Medal be awarded to groups or couples?

No. The SMVol is awarded to individuals only.

Can I nominate someone who has passed away?

No. Posthumous nominations are not accepted.

Can I nominate myself?

No. Self-nominations will not be accepted.

Can I nominate a family member?

Yes. Nominations from family members will be accepted; however, at least one of the supporting references must be from a non-family member.

How do I nominate someone?

To nominate an individual for consideration, please complete the online nomination form with the following information:

1. **Contact information** for yourself, as the nominator, and your nominee.
2. A **short description** of your nominee's voluntary contributions. Note that the description can be in point form instead of paragraphs. The description does not have to be lengthy, but it needs to provide the following information:
 - a. The **names of all organizations** with which the nominee has volunteered or volunteers.
 - b. The **years of service** with each organization, as well as the associated dates.
 - c. **The nominee's role as a volunteer** with each organization. For example, duties, tasks or responsibilities with each organization.
 - d. The nominee's **paid occupation** (current or previous if retired).
3. The **contact information for two references** who support the nomination and can describe the nominee's unpaid, sustained and significant volunteer work. Program staff will contact these references to ask for comments.

Is my nomination confidential?

Yes. Nominees are never told who their nominator is.

Nominators are asked not to notify the individual about the nomination in order to avoid disappointment if unsuccessful.

Program staff will notify successful nominees of their award by telephone.

The personal information provided online is secure and will not be shared.

How does the nomination process work?

Nominations received will undergo a four-step review process:

1. SMVol program staff will first review each nomination to ensure the nominee meets the three eligibility criteria.
2. Program staff will conduct research and reach out to references for comments. If necessary, they will also contact volunteer organizations. A short biography for each nominee is then prepared by the Chancellery.
3. Biographies are reviewed by an independent advisory committee, which makes recommendations to the governor general.
4. The governor general approves the recommended nominees and grants the Medal.

The selection process is merit-based and non-partisan.

Do I need to provide letters of support?

No. Nominators are not required to provide letters of support with their nomination. However, if you already have letters supporting your SMVol nomination, we are happy to receive them. Please send these to caring-entraide@gg.ca as attachments and be sure to write the name of the nominee in the subject line of your email.

What is the role of the Advisory Committee in the nomination process?

The independent SMVol Advisory Committee reviews and assesses nominations and recommends worthy individuals to receive the Medal. The Committee is made up of seven members from across the country with significant experience in the community and volunteerism sectors. Most of the members are recipients of the Medal themselves and have been appointed to the Committee by the governor general.

How long does the nomination process take?

The nomination process **may take up to three years** from the date of the submission to the date when a recipient is notified of the award.

Will the nominator be notified if their nominees become a recipient?

Yes. The nominator will be informed of the award via email. We put the nominator's email address in bcc on the congratulatory email sent to the recipient.

Please note that if the nominee is unsuccessful, the nominator will receive an email confirming that the Advisory Committee did not recommend an

award. **Nominees are not recommended if they do not meet the three eligibility criteria.**

Is there a deadline to submit nominations?

No. Nominations are accepted throughout the year on an on-going basis.

When is the Medal presented?

Presentation ceremonies are held throughout the year in communities across Canada. The Chancellery of Honours makes every effort to arrange a **presentation ceremony within three calendar years** of the date of the award. The recipient may also choose to have the Medal sent **by mail** within two months of being awarded it.

Who presents the Medal?

The SMVol may be presented by the governor general; however, it is more frequently presented by lieutenant governors, territorial commissioners, mayors or volunteer organizations.

What do recipients receive?

The Medal is accompanied by a lapel pin for everyday wear and a certificate signed by the governor general.

How and when should the Medal be worn?

Information on the wearing of the Medal is available in the Guide for the Wearing of Orders, Decorations and Medals.

According to the Order of Precedence, the SMVol is worn before any of the Canadian commemorative medals, such as the Diamond Jubilee Medal.

Does the honour entitle the recipient to use post-nominal letters?

No, there are no post-nominal letters associated with the SMVol. Post-nominal letters are only associated with Orders and Decorations.

Who do I contact if I have more questions?

SMVol program staff will be pleased to answer your questions. Please **call us at 1-800-465-6890** and ask to speak with someone from the SMVol program, or send us your questions via **email at caring-entraide@gg.ca**.