



2026

National Gold Medal Award

The Premiere Award in Parks and Recreation

Armed Forces Questions and Judging Criteria

This document provides the 2026 National Gold Medal Award Armed Forces application questions with assigned point values, maximum word count per question, and the criteria used by the National Gold Medal Award Judges to assess the applicant's responses. It is intended as a guide; judges apply their own experiences and knowledge in their assessment of each response.

Applicants should use this document as a guide to frame their responses however, they are encouraged to remember their installation program is unique in its financing, resources, constituents and challenges. The National Gold Medal Award seeks to identify those entities (public agencies and armed forces installation programs) that demonstrate excellence in managing and delivering high quality parks and recreation services, *regardless of the budget, the types and number of facilities, or size of staff.*

NOTE: Maximum total word count and point value vary for each question.

- 1. Each armed forces installation program has a unique purpose, mission, culture, and financing. Describe specific management practices or strategies that your program does well to meet its stated goals.**

Maximum 300 words / Maximum 15 points

*This question is for the installation to explain in broad terms the management practices or strategies that they judge they do well. Why do they believe they are a national leader in managing their program? This question is **not** about the magnitude of their resources (budget, revenues, grants, staff, facilities, etc) but how well they fulfill their mission and serve their community using the resources they have. The response should be linked to their vision, mission, goals and objectives, action plans, or strategic plan. The response is intended to tie what the program was created to do with how effective they are at managing their resources to achieve its mission.*

- 2. Building on your response from #1, how does your installation program measure success in the areas stated in Question 1? Provide three examples of what is measured, how it is measured, and how the data is used in decision-making.**

Maximum 240 words / Maximum 10 points

*In Question #1 the program is asked to state in broad terms why they believe they are a leader in managing its resources to meet its stated goals using the resources it has. The magnitude of the resources is **not** important; what is important is how effectively they manage their resources to achieve their mission, goals, and objectives. Programs are to provide three examples of the types of data collected and how used in decision-making.*

- 3. Effective programs understand their funding *regardless of the amount* and plan carefully how those funds will be used. Describe your program's fiscal management strategies and provide two examples of how funds are allocated to support your mission and goals.**

Maximum 240 words / Maximum 10 points

*This question seeks to learn the installation program's overall fiscal planning and management and how it applies the money it receives or generates to meet its stated mission and goals. The focus is on what the program does with the funds it receives. This question is **not** about the amount of funds the program receives or generates. Response should include two of its fiscal management strategies used in allocating funds.*

- 4. Provide three examples from the past three years of creative strategies that keep team members informed, engaged and involved in decision making. Explain desired outcomes, data collected, and how it informed actions.**

Maximum 240 words / Maximum 10 points

This question requests the installation program share new or creative actions it is taking to communicate and/or connect internally with its team members beyond staff meetings or newsletters. Have these efforts result in improved team morale, more efficient decision-making, and/or sharing of resources, etc.? Describe three initiatives or actions taken, the desired outcome(s) and how measured.

- 5. Provide three examples from the past three years of partnerships with external entities that expanded resources or increased impact. Describe the partnership, the data collected, the impact and the resulting impact.**

Maximum 240 words / Maximum 10 points

The intent of this question is to identify how the installation program externally communicates or connects with its community members, tenant commands, businesses or other entities to build relationships, increase resources or expand its influence. Describe three initiatives or actions undertaken, the desired outcome(s) and how measured.

- 6. Provide three examples from the past three years of measurable and impactful results your installation program has achieved. Provide context, the outcome(s) achieved, and how these results were communicated to decision makers as appropriate.**

Maximum 300 words / Maximum 10 points

Armed forces installation programs are often asked about their value and the impact they are having in their installation community, its personnel, dependents, and customers. This question seeks to determine if the program has identified and demonstrated the outcomes of their services and programs to its community and

decision makers. Describe three examples, why these outcome(s) were chosen, and how progress is measured and communicated.

- 7. Provide three examples from the past three years of innovative practices or approaches that strengthened the installation program's performance. Describe what was done and its impact on one or more areas (i.e., service delivery, programs, customer satisfaction, communications, partnerships, financial condition, maintenance practices, internal operations or staff performance).**

Maximum 300 words / Maximum 10 points

One of the strengths of the armed forces recreation profession is it is constantly reinventing itself and adapting to internal and external forces. Has the program reinvented/adapted by creating new innovations, delivery methods, partnerships, etc.? The intent of this question is to identify three new innovations the program has implemented during the last three years that has had a significant positive impact to the installation's community.

- 8. Provide two initiatives or actions your program has taken in the past three years to promote equity in programs, policies, and practices. Explain how these efforts ensure that all personnel, dependents, and community members have fair and inclusive access to quality programs and services. Provide context, the outcomes achieved, and how they were measured.**

Maximum 150 words / Maximum 5 points

The intent of this question is to learn if everyone in the installation community has fair and just access to quality spaces, facilities, recreation programs and services regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, age, language, or physical or mental abilities.

Is there an equitable delivery of facilities and recreation programs throughout the installation and has the program identified barriers that need addressing? Does the program recognize and celebrate differences and ensure all personnel, dependents and community members feel welcome? The program may submit it has identified inequities, provided it reports on how the inequities are being addressed.

- 9. Provide two examples from the past three years of how your installation program has connected personnel, dependents, and community members to programs, spaces or services that promote health and well-being. Provide context, the outcomes achieved and how they were measured.**

Maximum 150 words / Maximum 5 points

Installation recreation programs play a vital role in meeting the evolving health needs of their base community. Health and well-being can include programs that provide access to healthy foods; physical activity; social connections; nature; substance abuse prevention; mental health; or improve air and water quality. The core of this work is equity, ensuring personnel, dependents, and community members can achieve positive health and well-being outcomes.

- 10. Provide two examples from the past three years of how your installation program that advance or support DoD and/or installation efforts to promote environmental sustainability and resiliency. Provide context, the outcomes achieved, and how they were measured.**

Maximum 150 words / Maximum 5 points

Implementation of installation-wide sustainability measures that improve the environment as well as promote human and ecosystem health can include protecting the natural habitat, stormwater management and lowering of water usage, focused maintenance practices, reducing or eliminating use of carbon-based energy, reducing landfill waste, providing programs that educate and engage community members, and intentional communications through websites, social media, brochures, and signage.

- 11. Describe a challenge(s) your installation program has experienced in the past three years and how it responded. Explain how the program identified the challenge(s), the actions taken, and the results / changes achieved.**

Maximum 300 words / Maximum 10 points

There is no one answer to Question #11 as each installation program is different which means the challenge(s) a program faces will be unique. This question has three components: identification of the challenge, how the program responded, and the measurement(s) used to evaluate effectiveness. The challenges may be manmade, weather, unprecedented growth, government changes, pandemics, civil or political unrest. These ideas are not inclusive but are provided as possibilities.

TOTAL WORDS: 2610

TOTAL POINTS: 100

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American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration



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