



Australian Government

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

The National Medal

and

voluntary search and rescue organisations

Awards and Culture Branch
Government Division
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Canberra
Australia

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Disclaimer: this leaflet has been produced to provide guidance to voluntary search or rescue organisations seeking approval as eligible organisations for the National Medal. Nothing in this leaflet shall be read as entitling any voluntary organisation to be determined for the National Medal or any person to receive an entitlement to the award of the National Medal or a clasp to the National Medal.

The regulations for the National Medal were last revised on 11 April 2000, with effect from 18 June 1999. This Manual should be read in conjunction with those regulations.

A fuller treatment of the history, structure and operation of the *National Medal* is found in the **Chief Officer's Manual for the *National Medal*** available at www.itsanhonour.gov.au or from the address below.

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Table of contents

Introduction.....	1
Part 1: Approved voluntary organisations	2
How voluntary organisations become approved voluntary organisations	2
Approval dates for organisations	5
Obligations of approved voluntary organisations	5
Part 2: How to apply to become an approved voluntary organisation	6

Introduction

The *National Medal* was established on 14 February 1975 as one of the original elements of the distinctive Australian system of honours and awards. The *National Medal* recognises service in organisations which protect life and property at some hazard to their members. Many (but not all) of the eligible groups are uniformed.

The Medal is awarded to persons for long service in eligible organisations fulfilling the primary function. “Primary function” is explained in Part 1 of this leaflet. Fifteen years eligible service is necessary to qualify for the Medal (with clasps available for each additional period of ten years eligible service).

The Medal at the time of its introduction replaced a number of long service and good conduct awards issued to the Australian Defence Force, police forces and fire services under the Imperial system of honours. Imperial long service and good conduct awards earned before the introduction of the *National Medal* are still worn by current and former members of the respective services and are recognised in *The order of wearing Australian honours and awards*.

Today, the *National Medal* is available to those members of the following Australian services that perform the primary function and meet the standards required for the award:

- police forces
- fire services
- ambulance services
- the Australian Protective Service
- correctional services
- emergency services
- voluntary search and rescue organisations

Part 1: Approved voluntary organisations

Voluntary organisations that are incorporated in Australia and undertake search and/or rescue functions in Australia, may be determined by the Governor-General, on the advice of the Minister, as approved voluntary organisations for the purposes of the *National Medal*.¹

How voluntary organisations become approved voluntary organisations

Voluntary organisations with the primary function to provide, in Australia, in times of emergency or natural disaster:

“physical assistance to persons through search or rescue; **or**

physical assistance to protect property or the environment”

can be determined as “approved voluntary organisations”.²

Once a voluntary organisation is determined under regulation **10** it becomes an “approved voluntary organisation”. Those members of the organisation who perform the primary function and meet the criteria at regulation **19** can count their eligible service towards the *National Medal*. Service prior to the determination of the organisation may be credited in certain circumstances.³

Not all of a voluntary organisation needs to be a search or rescue organisation for it to become an approved voluntary organisation. Members who, in performing the search or rescue function, are exposed from time to time to the risk of death, injury or trauma undertake eligible service. It is service by these persons in this part of the organisation that is approved in a determination by the Governor-General.⁴

It is suggested that before submitting an application in terms of **Part 2** of this leaflet, an appropriate person from the organisation contact the Awards and Culture Branch to discuss the requirements needed for approval. Where an organisation is a member of a peak voluntary rescue association or similar body it may be helpful for it to consult that body before submitting an application. It is not necessary for each branch of an organisation to apply for approval. Where an organisation has coverage across a state and operates a local district structure, application for approval should be sought for the organisation as a whole; districts do not need to apply separately. An organisation which is national can apply on behalf of the whole organisation.

¹ See Part 4 of the regulations.

² See regulation 11(2)(a).

³ See regulations 12 and 20.

⁴ See regulation 11(2)(c).

To be eligible a voluntary organisation must:

- **not** be an organisation operated for profit, nor a government organisation.⁵

The receipt of a grant-in-aid from a government, sponsorship or fees-for-service does not preclude a voluntary organisation from being eligible to be approved for the Medal so long as its charter is not-for-profit.

- have a corporate existence.⁶

The organisation must be registered in Australia as a company, association, society, charity or under a royal charter and must issue an annual report and have audited accounts.

- be recognised by the Commonwealth, or a state or territory government as a voluntary organisation that responds in times of emergency in respect of the functions outlined above.

In many cases voluntary organisations will operate in only one state or territory, or be locally-based. The home state or territory government is the appropriate body to provide recognition to an organisation. A reference should be sought from the government authority with responsibility for the organisation's activities. Search or rescue organisations with a national focus should, in the first instance, contact the Awards and Culture Branch for advice.

Recognition by government may take the form of formal registration with a state rescue board (as in New South Wales; although not all groups registered will necessarily meet the criteria for the Medal), a formal arrangement with a police force to conduct maritime search or rescue work, or participation in a state disaster and emergency planning arrangement. Recognition is an essential pre-requisite for approval for access to the Medal.

- have terms of membership for those members performing the primary function that require the organisation or the Commonwealth or a state or territory government to insure, compensate or indemnify those members in respect of the performance of their search or rescue functions.⁷

⁵ This is specified in the definition of 'voluntary organisation' in regulation 2, Interpretation.

⁶ This is also specified in the definition of 'voluntary organisation' in regulation 2, Interpretation.

⁷ See regulation 11(2)(d).

- maintain a training regime sufficient to ensure that the members who perform the primary function are fit for their duties.⁸

The level of training and fitness must be sufficient for all persons in the primary function to fulfil their duties. An applicant organisation should be able to demonstrate that a training regime is operative and that records of training are maintained.

- have a responsible person to perform the duties of a chief officer.⁹

The chief officer will usually be the chief executive officer or the person occupying the highest office in the organisation, for example, the president. A voluntary organisation may specify another member of the organisation to perform the duties of chief officer, or appoint an external person (for example, a member of a peak voluntary rescue association) to perform this function. In this case, the name of the person discharging the chief officer's functions must be notified to the Registrar of *National Medals* at Government House, Canberra.

The chief officer is responsible for ensuring that the organisation meets and continues to meet the Medal criteria, nominating eligible persons for the Medal and clasp and keeping records of members' service.

- maintain records sufficient for the chief officer to meet the obligations placed on the organisation by the regulations.¹⁰

The records maintained by the organisation must be adequate to enable the chief officer to certify to the Governor-General recommendations for the award of Medals and clasps. Records may be audited to ensure that this requirement is met, and recommendations which are not sustained by appropriate records may result in awards being cancelled, and place the approval of the organisation at risk.¹¹

A voluntary organisation which seeks to become an approved voluntary organisation for the Medal should, after consulting the Awards and Culture Branch, make application to the Branch, providing the information outlined in **Part 2**.

Once an application and reference are received and the Awards and Culture Branch has completed its enquiries, the organisation's application will be submitted to a committee, which includes experts in search and rescue, for consideration. The organisation will be advised as soon as possible whether its application has been successful or unsuccessful or if further information is required. Where successful, a member of the government will recommend to

⁸ See regulation 11(2)(e).

⁹ See regulation 11(2)(g).

¹⁰ See regulation 11(2)(f).

¹¹ Regulation 11(2)(h) requires an approved voluntary organisation to allow access to its premises and records by the Minister or the Minister's delegate. Regulation 26 provides the power for the Governor-General to cancel an award of the Medal. Regulation 30 provides that the Governor-General may revoke a determination for an approved government or voluntary organisation.

the Governor-General that a determination be made approving the organisation. The approval of organisations will be publicised in the *Commonwealth Gazette* from time to time.

Approval dates for organisations

The approval date for an organisation is one of the factors which determines whether a person is eligible to be awarded the *National Medal*. At least one day of a person's service with an organisation must be on, or after, that organisation's approval date.¹²

For approved voluntary organisations the approval date is the date mentioned in the determination, or if no approval date is mentioned, the date of the determination. (See regulations **6** and **12**.) There is typically a delay of several months, while processing and assessment takes place, between the submission of an application by a voluntary organisation and the making of a determination. The approval date is usually the date on which the application was received by the Awards and Culture Branch.

Obligations of approved voluntary organisations

Approved voluntary organisations that cease to exist or cease to perform the primary function can be declared as no longer approved.¹³ Eligible service earned with the organisation while it was approved remains valid. An organisation which changes its name, but otherwise retains its functions and structure, must advise the Awards and Culture Branch of such a change. A name change can be made without altering the organisation's eligibility for the Medal.¹⁴

Organisations which fail to maintain the standards required to be an approved voluntary organisation or which nominate ineligible persons for the Medal or clasp can have their approval terminated and Medals and clasps cancelled.¹⁵ The Australian Government reserves the right to undertake audits of records to ensure an organisation is continuing to meet its responsibilities as an approved body.¹⁶

The organisation must notify the Registrar of *National Medals* at Government House, Canberra, of the name of the chief officer if this is other than the head of the organisation.¹⁷ The Registrar should be advised when there is a change.

¹² See regulation 16(b)(ii). Regulation 16(b)(i) also provides that at least one day of a person's service must be on, or after, 14 February 1975 (the date on which the *National Medal* was established).

¹³ See regulation 13.

¹⁴ See regulation 14.

¹⁵ See regulations 26 and 30.

¹⁶ See regulation 11(2)(h).

¹⁷ See paragraph (b) of the definition of 'chief officer' in regulation 2, Interpretation.

Part 2: How to apply to become an approved voluntary organisation

It is not necessary for each element of a voluntary organisation to apply to become an approved voluntary organisation. Where an organisation has coverage across a state or territory but with a local branch structure, application for accreditation should be sought for the organisation as a whole; districts do not need to apply separately. A search or rescue body with a national charter can apply on behalf of its whole national organisation.

The head of the voluntary organisation should forward a submission to the Assistant Secretary of the Awards and Culture Branch presenting information using the headings and question numbers provided below.

The organisation must provide, in Australia, in times of emergency or natural disaster:

physical assistance to persons through search or rescue; or

physical assistance to protect property or the environment.¹⁸

This is known as the “primary function”, although it does not need to be the focus of the organisation’s activities. Only persons performing this function and satisfying other eligibility criteria¹⁹ can be awarded the Medal. Heading “H”, below, seeks specific confirmation of this function.

A Contact information

1. Full registered name of the organisation.
2. Physical address of the head office.
3. Postal address of the head office.
4. Telephone number of the head office (including area code).
5. Facsimile number of the head office (including area code).
6. Name and title of the head of the organisation.
7. Name, title, telephone number (including area code) and e-mail address (if available) of an officer who can be contacted for further information about the application.

¹⁸ This requirement is specified in regulation 11(2)(a).

¹⁹ See regulations 11(2)(c) and 19.

B Corporate structure

The Regulations define voluntary organisation, in part, to mean an organisation incorporated in Australia. Therefore, to become an approved voluntary organisation for the Medal, an organisation needs to be incorporated. The following information will need to be provided.

1. Method of incorporation and Australian Securities and Investments Commission number (if relevant).
2. State or territory of incorporation.

Incorporation must be in Australia and can be as a company, association, society, charity or under a royal charter.

A copy of the organisation's articles of association or constitution and a copy of the most recent annual report and statement of audited accounts should be provided with the application.

3. Has the organisation ever been prosecuted by a regulatory body for being in breach of any requirements of the legislation under which it is incorporated? If 'no', this must be stated. If 'yes', provide details.

C Voluntary status

The Regulations also define voluntary organisation, in part, to mean an organisation that is not a government organisation and is not operated for profit. The following information will need to be provided.

1. Is the organisation a 'voluntary organisation' as defined at regulation 2 (Interpretation)?
2. Are government grants received? If so, provide details.
3. Are fees for service earned? If so, provide details.
4. Are sponsorships received from non-government sources? If so, provide details.

Grants, fees for service and sponsorships do not preclude approval so long as the organisation is a voluntary, non-government, non-profit organisation. The above details will assist the evaluation of the organisation's role and structure. It is not necessary to specify the value of grants, fees or sponsorship.

D Relationship with home state or territory government

1. Is the organisation recognised by a department or agency of the Commonwealth government, or a state or territory government as an organisation of the kind described in regulation 11(2)? Give details.

2. Which Commonwealth, state or territory organisation recognises the organisation?
3. Is the organisation called upon by police or other agencies, for search or rescue? Give details.
4. Is the organisation part of a state or territory disaster plan? Give details.
5. Does a government body such as a state rescue board register the organisation? Give details.

The organisation should seek an authoritative reference from the appropriate government authority. This authority would normally be the government agency responsible for emergency services with which the organisation works or which calls upon it to provide its search and rescue services. This reference should indicate that the state or territory government recognises and regards the organisation as a *bona fide* search or rescue organisation. The reference should accompany the application.

E Peak bodies

1. Is the organisation a member of a peak rescue association; for example, the Volunteer Rescue Association of NSW? If “yes”, provide details.

F History

1. When was the organisation established (exact date)?
2. When did the organisation commence providing physical assistance in search or rescue activities, if not at the time of its establishment (exact date)?

Full details, including dates, should also be provided if the organisation previously provided physical assistance in search or rescue under different names. The organisation may also be approved under its earlier names, enabling eligible service during the earlier period(s) to count towards the Medal. Defunct organisations must have been in existence on, or after, 30 April 1987, to be eligible.

G Geographical extent

1. Does the organisation operate nationally or in a particular state or territory or locality?

Advise whether local branches are operative and, if so, where they are located.

H Nature of search or rescue functions

1. Does the organisation (or a part of it) provide in Australia in times of emergency or natural disaster:

- (a) physical assistance to persons through search or rescue; or
- (b) physical assistance to protect property or the environment?

2. What type of search or rescue functions does the organisation undertake?

For example, "marine rescue in New South Wales". Give details.

3. What type of physical assistance in search or rescue does the organisation provide?

For example, "rescue by boat, salvage, search and patrol operations". Give details.

4. Are members performing the primary (search or rescue) function exposed from time to time to the risk of death, injury or trauma? Give details.

5. What occupational categories of the organisation meet the criteria (i.e. on whose behalf is this application being made)?

6. Does the organisation have other functions besides search or rescue?

7. If the answer to 6, is 'yes', identify the part of the organisation for which approval is sought.

Identify the component or aspect of the organisation that undertakes search or rescue or, if members undertake search or rescue in addition to the other roles of the organisation, identify these (for example, recreational sailing). Identify the occupational categories which the organisation believes should be eligible service for the Medal.

8. Provide the latest year statistics on the numbers of members of the organisation as a whole and details of the number who undertake the primary function and are in the occupational categories identified at 5; that is, those which provide physical assistance (for example, rescue by boat) as opposed to support operations (for example, radio operation) or other activities.

Provide sufficient detail to clearly illustrate the role of personnel, how they operate, the duties performed and the risks faced. Where given personnel perform, over time, both the primary function and support roles, outline how this works and the proportion of persons and percentage of time in the respective roles. Advise how often members who perform the primary function are expected to be on call, undertake training and so on, to be regarded as active members whose time would be counted as eligible service.

9. Provide statistics on how often and how many members performing the primary function were called out and the number of rescues or searches in the most recent year.

10. If the organisation is approved, how many members do you expect to nominate for the Medal in the first year?

This information has no bearing on whether an organisation will be approved. It is solely to assist the Registrar of *National Medals* to plan forward orders for Medals.

I Insurance, compensation or indemnity

The Regulations also define voluntary organisation, in part, to mean an organisation that is not a government organisation and is not operated for profit. The following information will need to be provided.

1. What scheme of insurance, indemnity or compensation operates for members performing the primary function?
2. Is it the organisation or the home state or territory government which operates this scheme?
3. Is it a government requirement?
4. Are records maintained in respect of insurance, compensation or indemnity? Who keeps the records?
5. Provide statistics of the numbers of persons killed or injured in the latest year as a result of performing the primary function and the numbers of claims made under the scheme of insurance, compensation or indemnity.

J Training and fitness

1. Does the organisation maintain a mandatory training regime to ensure members performing the primary function are fit to fulfil their duties? Provide details.
2. Are members trained before joining or trained externally or within the organisation? Give details.
3. Are there competency levels; for example, for marine rescue? Give details.
4. Are records maintained of members' training?
5. What physical fitness standards are applied?

K Records

1. Are sufficient records maintained to enable the chief officer to meet the requirements of nominating eligible persons for the Medal or clasp?

Regulation 19(1) establishes that service is “eligible service” if it is in the primary function and throughout the period of service a person has maintained a level of training and fitness, and has been ready and available, to perform the primary function. Records of the organisation must be sufficiently detailed to support the conclusion that a person has met these requirements.

2 Are records kept of each search and rescue incident in which the organisation was involved and the names of individual members who attended?

L Chief Officer

1. Does the organisation have a chief officer for the purposes of the regulations?²⁰

The chief officer would usually be the chief executive officer or the person occupying the highest office in the organisation, for example, the President. An organisation may specify another person to perform the duties of chief officer on its behalf; for example, a member or an officer of the organisation’s peak body.

M Responsibility

The following statements should be typed at the end of the application and signed by the responsible officer (normally the head of the organisation):

1. I certify the accuracy of the information in this application for approval of [name of organisation] for the *National Medal*;

2. I confirm on behalf of [name of organisation] that both before approval and, if granted, after approval, the organisation agrees to give the Minister or a delegate of the Minister access to its premises and records maintained on its behalf and that this commitment extends to an external person if nominated to act as chief officer’;²¹

3. I confirm on behalf of [name of organisation] that written advice will be provided promptly to the Awards and Culture Branch of (i) any material change to the organisation which could lead to it no longer meeting the criteria to remain an approved voluntary organisation and (ii) of any change of name’;²² and

²⁰ Provisions relating to the chief officer’s role are contained in regulations 2, 11(2)(d) to (h), 13(1), 14(1), 15(1), 18(1), 18(2), 19, 20, 22, 24, 25 and 26.

²¹ See regulations 2 and 11(2)(h).

²² See regulations 13, 14 and 15.

4. I agree on behalf of [name of organisation] that in assessing this application, the Awards and Culture Branch may make such inquiries as are deemed necessary, including, but not restricted to, governments, regulatory authorities and voluntary associations.'

WARNING: The provision of false or misleading information may lead to the organisation having its approval revoked and to the cancellation of awards.

The organisation will be advised as soon as possible as to the outcome of its application or if further information is required. Where successful, the Minister (that is, a member of the government) will make a recommendation to the Governor-General that the organisation be approved. Approved bodies will be gazetted from time to time.

Before sending your submission, check that the following documents are enclosed:

- articles of association;
- most recent annual report and statement of audited accounts; and
- reference from the relevant government authority.