

Governor's Youth Volunteer Award

Program Guide for School Coordinators



Executive Summary

The **Governor's Youth Volunteer Award**, created by Volunteer Iowa (The Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service), recognizes high school students who make meaningful contributions to their communities through service. This statewide recognition program establishes a uniform standard for quality youth volunteerism across Iowa, encouraging students to engage in authentic service, whether through community partners or youth-led projects, while supporting their growth as lifelong civic leaders.

Program Highlights

- **Recognition:** Graduating seniors who complete at least 150 certified service hours and submit a reflective essay receive:
 - A digitally signed certificate from the Governor of Iowa
 - Potential recognition at a statewide ceremony
- **Eligibility:** Open to all Iowa grade 12 students at participating schools. Not sure if your school is participating? Send us an email at kamryn.ryan@volunteeriowa.org.
- **No Cost:** Unlike the traditional Governor's Volunteer Award, there is no financial cost associated with receiving the Governor's Youth Volunteer Award.
- **Impact:** The program strengthens communities, elevates the value of youth service, and provides a cohesive statewide framework for recognizing the impact of Iowa's young volunteers.

Program Goals

1. Create a uniform recognition program across Iowa that ensures all students' service contributions are valued at the highest level.
2. Ensure that both youth volunteers and the communities they serve experience the full benefits of service.
3. Foster lifelong commitment to civic engagement and community service

Important Links

- [School Registration Form](#) to participate in Governor's Youth Volunteer Award Program. *(Due September 30th annually)*
- [Student Submission Form](#) of students eligible to receive Governor's Youth Volunteer Award. *(Due April 20th annually)*
- [Template Submission Form](#) to utilize when collecting student information for submission. *(Optional)*
- [Volunteer Iowa website](#) for more information about service in Iowa.

About the Youth Governor's Volunteer Award

Program Origin & Purpose

The Governor's Youth Volunteer Award is an extension of Iowa's long-standing Governor's Volunteer Award program. While the traditional Governor's Volunteer Award includes a handling fee to support administrative costs, the Governor's Youth Volunteer Award is provided at **no cost** to schools or students, ensuring that financial barriers do not prevent young people from being honored for their service.

Program Distinction

This award establishes a uniform statewide recognition standard for youth volunteerism. Such cohesion ensures that students' contributions are valued consistently and meaningfully by postsecondary institutions and employers. Standardization promotes:

- **Consistency:** All Iowa students are recognized using the same rigorous criteria.
- **Credibility:** Colleges, universities, and employers understand the award's value.
- **Access:** Recognition is available consistently across all Iowa schools.
- **Quality Assurance:** Ensures both youth and communities experience the full benefits of high-quality service.

Relationship to Existing Youth Volunteer Recognition Programs

Many Iowa schools operate their own recognition initiatives, such as Silver Cord, with varying requirements. The Governor's Youth Volunteer Award:

- **Complements** school-based programs
- Can be awarded **in addition** to Silver Cord and other local awards
- Provides **consistent statewide standards** while allowing schools to maintain their own requirements if they choose
- Offers **prestigious state-level recognition** issued through the Governor's Office

Schools are encouraged to integrate the Governor's Youth Volunteer Award guidelines into their existing youth service recognition systems or adjust their current programs to align with the award criteria, helping ensure high-quality service experiences for students.

Recognition Components

Graduating seniors who complete the award requirements receive:

1. **Certificate:** Official digital certificate signed by the Governor of Iowa.

2. **Website Spotlight:** All Governor's Youth Volunteer Award recipients will be recognized on Volunteer Iowa's website.
3. **Statewide Ceremony:** Potential recognition at a ceremony attended by the Governor, if selected by the school to represent the program. Students selected by their school to attend the statewide recognition ceremony will receive a commemorative pin, a printed certificate, and a brief photo opportunity with the Governor at the event.
4. **School Recognition:** Schools may choose to provide additional honors (such as Silver Cord presentations at graduation).
5. **Optional Printable Posters:** Schools receive a downloadable poster template they can print to create a recognize students within their school, community, and/or at graduation or awards ceremony.

Important Note: Schools may request a hard-copy version of the certificate. A small printing and mailing fee may apply, and delivery times may vary. Schools may also choose to print their own certificates using the official digital file provided.

There is no financial award or scholarship assistance provided to recipients. The recognition is ceremonial and resume-building in nature.

Timeline

- **September 30:** Schools must complete a [registration form](#) annually if they intend to participate in the program for that school year.
- **Early October:** School coordinators must attend an informational webinar hosted by Volunteer Iowa on best practices for implementing this program.
- **April 20:** Schools [submit eligible students' information to Volunteer Iowa](#) via the online form. We recommend utilizing this [submission form template](#) to keep track of eligible students. Schools must select which students will attend the statewide ceremony and submit names to Volunteer Iowa on the same form.
- **Late April/Early May:** Digital certificates are emailed to school coordinator for distribution to students. Optional hard-copy certificates may be purchased for a small mailing/printing fee. Delivery times may vary and hard copies cannot be guaranteed to arrive before specific ceremonies or events. **If you are interested, please contact Volunteer Iowa prior to April 20th deadline to coordinate.**
- **June/July:** Statewide recognition ceremony with the Governor of Iowa. More details will be sent closer to the event.

Program Eligibility & Requirements

Student Eligibility

Minimum Hour Requirement: 150 verified service/volunteer hours completed between the summer after 8th grade and the end of 12th grade.

Essay Requirement: A short reflection essay (250-400 words) addressing three prompts.

Eligible Students: Only graduating seniors may receive the award in their graduation year. Students may earn the award only **once**.

School Eligibility & Requirements

Eligible Schools:

- Public high schools
- Private high schools
- Homeschool programs that partner with a local public school to participate in the program through dual enrollment. Note: this option is only available to students registered under Competent Private Instruction (CPI), not Independent Private Instruction (IPI). This partnership mirrors how students may join public school extracurricular activities (e.g., band, fine arts, or sports). Learn more about [CPI versus IPI on the Iowa Department of Education website](#) and [extracurriculars for homeschool students](#).

School Responsibilities:

☐ Complete Volunteer Iowa's School Registration Form

- Schools must complete the [registration form](#) annually by September 30th to participate in the program for that school year.
- Form must be completed each year, even if schools have participated in previous years.

☐ Designate a Sponsor/Administrator:

- Required staff point of contact for Volunteer Iowa & students.
- Sponsors/administrators must complete a brief orientation provided by Volunteer Iowa.
- Carry out responsibilities listed below.

☐ **Recruit and Inform Students:**

- Promote the program to students (summer after 8th grade-12th grade).
- Share information at orientation, classrooms, newsletters, etc.
- Distribute reflection prompts and interest surveys to promote meaningful engagement.
- (Recommended) Share provided email templates for students contacting volunteer sites.

☐ **Certify Service Hours:**

- Schools may use their own tracking forms, our provided template, or the free, online statewide volunteer database [Get Connected](#).
- Students submit documentation to coordinator prior to April 20th deadline. We recommend setting an internal deadline in early April to prepare materials for submission by the 20th.

☐ **Collect Student Essays:**

- Collect reflection essays. We recommend a submission deadline around spring break.
- Attach essays to the application/submission to Volunteer Iowa.
- Schools may approve or deny essays based on own discretion.

☐ **Final Submission:**

- Select one to three students to attend the statewide ceremony as school representatives, based on own discretion.
- [Submit eligible students to Volunteer Iowa](#) April 20th via the online form.
- Include student first and last names as it should appear on certificate.
- Attach essays or provide link to viewable folder.
- Distribute the official materials (certificate, poster, etc.) to all recognized students for use.
- Share ceremony details with selected students once provided by Volunteer Iowa.

Important Note: Due to ceremony logistics, only a limited number of students from each school will be able to attend the statewide ceremony. Schools are encouraged to create their own process for selecting representatives. We recommend selecting between one and three students.

Potential selection methods include:

- Naming a “service valedictorian” (students with the highest number of service hours)
- A class vote among eligible award recipients
- Evaluation of reflection essays
- Teacher and/or nonprofit feedback

Documentation & Tracking

Hour Tracking Options:

1. **School-Based Systems:** Schools may use their own certification forms and logging systems. See template form in Appendices.
2. **(RECOMMENDED) [Get Connected](#) Platform:** Iowa's statewide volunteer platform.
 - Organizations can share volunteer opportunities for individuals to find
 - Students can track hours served with organizations
 - Organizations can approve the time volunteers reported
 - Available as a mobile app "Causer" for quick hour reporting

Eligible Service & Volunteerism Categories

Definition of Service

Service or volunteering is the act of helping others in a **meaningful** and **authentic** way that creates positive social change.

Meaningful and Authentic Service:

- Addresses a need unique to a specific, determined community
- Actively engages volunteers in conversation about how their role contributes to change
- Creates impact on both micro (individual) and macro (community) scales

Types of Service

The Governor's Youth Volunteer Award recognizes three primary categories of service:

1. Awareness

Definition: Share information and educate others to positively influence behaviors.

Examples:

- Creating posters promoting recycling
- Teaching families how to prepare for emergencies
- Leading an anti-bullying social media campaign
- Developing educational materials about community issues
- Meeting with elected officials about a specific cause

2. Direct & Indirect Service

Definition: Use time, creativity, and talent to directly meet a community need.

Examples:

- Tutoring younger students
- Serving meals at a shelter
- Organizing donations at a thrift store
- Teaching technology skills to seniors

3. Philanthropy

Definition: Collecting and donating financial or in-kind support to address community needs.

Examples:

- Hosting food drives for local pantries
- Collecting books or games for children
- Leading fundraising campaigns and events

Skilled Volunteering

Young people are strongly encouraged to leverage their unique skills, ideas, and perspectives to assist organizations. Examples include:

- Designing posters or flyers to promote services
- Creating websites or digital content to build nonprofit capacity
- Supporting data entry, collection, analysis, or research
- Helping translate materials or providing interpretation for individuals
- Producing short videos for campaigns, events, or social media storytelling

Service Delivery Methods

Option 1: Volunteer With a Community Partner

This is the most common type of service where students:

- Identify volunteer opportunities near them
- Apply to serve with established organizations
- Complete assigned tasks during their volunteer time

Enhanced Approach:

- Use reflection questions and interest surveys to identify interests and skills. This helps students contribute in ways organizations may not have realized were possible and support the essay portion of the award.
- Consider serving with a Service Enterprise—agencies that strategically leverage volunteers at all levels to fulfill their mission. Accredited organizations are listed on [Volunteer Iowa's website](#).

Finding Opportunities:

- [Get Connected](#): Iowa's statewide volunteer portal
- Local volunteer centers (see template email in Appendices)
- Community organizations, churches, schools, local municipalities, clubs, and nonprofits

Option 2: Youth-Led Service Projects (Highly Encouraged)

When communities lack existing volunteer placements, or when students want to take initiative, youth-led service projects offer a meaningful alternative. Students can lead a full project cycle by:

1. **Investigating:** Identifying a community need they are passionate about
2. **Planning:** Researching the issue and creating an action plan
3. **Acting:** Launching and implementing the project
4. **Reflecting:** Thinking critically about their impact
5. **Demonstrating:** Sharing results with others

Important: Hours spent researching and planning a youth-led project count toward the award. This structure should also be utilized for service-learning projects in classrooms. **Service-learning project hours also count towards this award.**

Example Project:

A student surveys their grade level about school climate, identifies ways to promote positivity, partners with the school counselor to implement the plan, and creates affirmation cards to place in student lockers.

Services That Do NOT Qualify

The following activities do **not** count towards the Youth Governor's Volunteer Award:

- Service for which you receive payment or financial compensation. *Note: this does not include AmeriCorps or Youth Corps Members.*
- Babysitting for family members or friends. However, we do allow supporting foster care families with childcare needs.
- Practices for other activities, such as music or sports.
- Hours that involve direct participation in religious rituals, services, or ceremonies (e.g., singing in choir, altar service, reading religious texts).
- Travel time to and from service sites.
- Sleeping or personal recreation time during service hours.
- Court-ordered service may only account for 25 hours of service in this program. Additional required hours may not count.

Important Note: Faith-based organizations may sponsor volunteer service, but hours cannot be earned through participation in worship services or religious rituals.

Essay Requirements

Purpose of the Essay

To receive the Youth Governor's Volunteer Award, students must complete 150 hours of service *and* submit a short reflective essay. The essay helps students:

- Think critically about the community needs they addressed
- Reflect on skills, insights, and personal growth gained
- Consider how they will continue contributing beyond high school
- Develop a deeper understanding of civic responsibility
- Recognize just the hours served, but the impact made

Essay Specifications

Length: 250-400 words (approximately ½ to 1 page)

Format: Paragraph form (no bullet points)

Submission Process:

- Students submit essays to their school's sponsor or administrator by the school's internal deadline.
- Schools include all essays with their submission to Volunteer Iowa, due April 20th.

Essay Collection Guidance for Schools:

- Provide essay instructions to seniors early in the spring semester.
- Set an internal submission deadline (typically early April).
- Review essays to ensure all three required prompts are addressed.
- Compile and submit essays to Volunteer Iowa by April 20th.

Three Required Prompts

Students must respond to all three prompts within their essay. Students may **NOT** utilize AI tools to write their essay.

1. Describe the Service You Completed

- What issue or community need did your service address?
- How did you volunteer and what activities did you perform?

2. Reflect on Your Experience

- What did you learn about your community?
- What did you learn about service?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What parts of the experience did you enjoy?
- What parts were challenging or uncomfortable?

3. Look Forward

- How might you continue addressing this issue in the future?
- How do you plan to support your community going forward?
- How has this experience shaped your view of civic engagement?

Supporting the Reflection Process

To help students think deeply about their service throughout the year, Volunteer Iowa provides reflection questions for before, during and after service (see Appendices). These tools help students:

- Identify causes they care about.
- Connect service activities to community needs.
- Recognize skill development and personal growth.
- Consider how they will remain engaged after receiving the award.

Schools are encouraged to integrate this model into their existing service or recognition programs. The framework is designed to serve as a baseline that schools can adopt as-is or

adapt to complement programs such as Silver Cord, National Honor Society (NHS) service expectations, senior service requirements, or other local initiatives.

Additional Recognition Options for Schools

The Governor's Youth Volunteer Award framework is designed to provide a consistent, research-based model that schools can adopt as their only recognition program or integrate into their existing programs. Because the statewide framework reflects best practices and youth feedback, schools are encouraged to use it as the foundation for a high-quality service recognition program.

For Schools with Existing Recognition Programs

Schools with established programs can strengthen their approach by aligning with the Governor's Youth Volunteer Award framework. Suggested strategies include:

- Continue offering existing recognition as a local option.
- Add the Governor's Youth Volunteer Award as statewide recognition option.
- Align hour-tracking systems and reflection expectations where possible.
- Allow students who meet your program's hour requirements (150+ hours) to automatically qualify for the Governor's Youth Volunteer Award. Existing documented hours may count toward the award as long as they meet statewide criteria.
- Review your program structure against this framework to identify opportunities to adopt elements of the statewide model to promote high-quality service experiences.

For Schools Without an Existing Program

Schools not currently offering a service recognition program are encouraged to adopt the Governor's Youth Volunteer Award model as their primary framework. Suggested steps:

- Use the statewide model to build a new, high-quality local program.
- Begin with the tiered structure and adapt based on school capacity.
- Partner with Volunteer Iowa and local volunteer centers for support.
- Implement consistent expectations for hours, reflection, and tracking.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

General Program Questions

Q: What is the Governor's Youth Volunteer Award?

A: It is a statewide recognition program administered by Volunteer Iowa that honors graduating high school seniors who complete at least 150 hours of volunteer service and submit a

reflective essay. Awardees receive a certificate signed by the Governor. Select students may attend a statewide ceremony to meet the Governor of Iowa.

Q: How is this different from the regular Governor's Volunteer Award?

A: The Governor's Youth Volunteer Award is specifically for high school seniors and is free for schools and students. The traditional Governor's Volunteer Award honors adult and youth volunteers nominated by organizations and includes a small administrative fee.

Q: Is there a cost to participate?

A: No. Participation is free for schools and students. Costs may occur if schools would like to purchase physical award certificates.

Q: Can students from any type of school participate?

A: Yes. Public, private, and homeschooled (dual enrollment) students are all eligible to participate. Only seniors are eligible to receive the award, but students may begin collecting hours for the program the summer after 8th grade.

Q: Can an organization (nonprofit, youth center, etc.) register students instead of a school?

A: No. However, these organizations can submit youth for the standard [Governor's Volunteer Award](#) and pay a small fee.

Eligibility Questions

Q: When can students start counting volunteer hours?

A: Hours count starting the summer after completing 8th grade.

Q: What is the minimum number of hours required?

A: Students must complete a minimum of 150 volunteer service hours between 8th and the end of 12th grade.

Q: Can students receive the award more than once?

A: No. It is awarded once, upon graduation.

Service Hours Questions

Q: What types of service qualify?

A: Service must create positive community impact and students may not be paid for service. Youth-led projects and service-learning projects count as long as they benefit the community.

Q: Can students count hours from youth-led service projects?

A: Yes. Students may count participation hours from all stages of a youth-led service project, including research and planning time. Service-learning hours may also be counted.

Q: Do service hours need to be with nonprofit organizations?

A: Not always. Hours can be through nonprofits, schools, government agencies, clubs, faith-based organizations, or youth-led projects.

Q: Can students volunteer at for-profit businesses?

A: Generally, no, unless the activity clearly benefits the community, not the business (e.g., hosting a public awareness event, community beautification project).

Q: Does time spent fundraising count?

A: Yes, if the fundraising benefits a community cause or nonprofit—not personal gain or team-specific fundraisers.

Q: Can religious service hours count?

A: Yes, if the service focuses on community benefit (e.g., mission projects, food pantries). Hours from participating in religious services or rituals do not count.

Q: Do court-ordered service hours count?

A: Yes, but only 25 hours of court-ordered service is eligible to count. Students must complete additional hours outside of court requirements.

Q: Do summer hours count?

A: Yes. Summer hours between school years count.

Q: Can travel time to volunteer sites be counted?

A: No. Only direct service or project time qualifies.

School & Documentation Questions

Q: How do schools participate?

A: Schools designate a sponsor/administrator, register through [Volunteer Iowa's online form](#) by September 30th, and complete required orientation. Schools must submit names of students and those selected to attend statewide ceremony by April 20th, if not sooner. Schools may opt out of participating at any time.

Q: What do schools need to submit to be eligible?

A: Schools must submit a list of first and last names to be placed on digital certificates, total hours served per student, and student essays. Schools have the option of submitting a list of community organizations that students served with to spotlight the agency. Schools are encouraged to maintain documentation of hours completed, organization or service site, and supervisor verification. Schools may use their own tracking system or [Get Connected](#).

Q: When must schools submit their student lists?

A: Schools must submit all eligible students and submit names of students participating in the statewide ceremony to Volunteer Iowa by April 20th. Schools set their own internal deadlines earlier in April.

Q: Can schools continue using their existing tracking system?

A: Yes. Schools may use existing or local tracking forms. Aligning with statewide standards is encouraged for consistency.

Q: How do homeschool students participate?

A: Homeschool students may participate through a local public school via dual enrollment. This option is only available to students registered under Competent Private Instruction (CPI). This partnership mirrors how students may join public school extracurricular activities (e.g., band, fine arts, or sports).

Q: What if a student didn't track hours well?

A: Students may work with organizations and/or the school coordinator to reconstruct records. It is up to the school coordinator's discretion if hours qualify.

Essay Questions

Q: What does the essay require?

A: A 250-400 word reflective essay responding to: description of the service completed, reflection on what the student learned, and plans for future service or civic engagement. It should be written in paragraph form.

Q: When is the essay due?

A: Students submit essays to their school coordinator by the school's internal deadline (usually early April).

Q: Can students write about more than one service experience?

A: Yes. The essay can reflect on a combination of experiences.

Recognition & Benefits Questions

Q: What do recipients receive?

A: Recipients receive a digital certificate signed by the Governor of Iowa, recognition on Volunteer Iowa's website, eligibility for statewide ceremony recognition, and optional school-level recognition.

Q: Is there a monetary scholarship associated with this award?

A: No. There is no financial award or scholarship assistance provided. The recognition is ceremonial and resume-building in nature.

Q: Can students wear special cords at graduation?

A: This depends on the school. Schools may elect to provide silver cords or other recognition items at their discretion.

Q: When is the statewide ceremony held?

A: The ceremony is typically held in June. Specific date will be communicated to participating schools by Volunteer Iowa.

Q: What typically occurs at the statewide ceremony?

A: The Governor's Volunteer Awards (GVAs) is the official statewide ceremony selected youth will attend. The ceremony is similar to a graduation where the Governor of Iowa gives remarks

and awards are participated to each individual GVA nominee. The nominee will have a short description of their service read as they walk across the stage to receive the certificate from the Governor. A brief photo will be taken. Light refreshments typically follow the event.

Q: Can this award help with college applications?

A: Yes. The Governor's Youth Volunteer Award is valuable for college applications and resumes, demonstrating commitment to community service and leadership.

Relationship to Silver Cord Programs

Q: How does this relate to school Silver Cord programs?

A: The Governor's Youth Volunteer Award complements existing Silver Cord programs by providing additional state-level recognition. Schools can maintain their own Silver Cord standards while also recognizing students who meet the Governor's Youth Volunteer Award criteria. However, Volunteer Iowa highly encourages programs to adapt their recognition program to reflect best practices as described here to ensure meaningful volunteer experiences for youth and the organizations they serve with.

Q: Can students receive both Silver Cord and Governor's Youth Volunteer Award?

A: Yes. Students can receive both if they meet the requirements for each program.

Q: What if our school's Silver Cord requires more hours than the Governor's Youth Volunteer Award?

A: That's excellent! Students who complete your Silver Cord requirements will easily meet the Governor's Youth Volunteer Award minimum of 150 hours.

Q: What if our school doesn't have a Silver Cord program?

A: Not a problem. The Governor's Youth Volunteer Award is designed to work for schools with or without existing recognition programs.

Support & Contact Questions

Q: Who can I contact with questions about the program?

A: Contact Volunteer Iowa at info@volunteerioda.org or call 800.308.5987. Contact the Youth Services & Capacity Building Officer, Kamryn Ryan, at kamryn.ryan@volunteerioda.org.

Q: Where can students find volunteer opportunities?

A: Students can find opportunities through [Get Connected](#), local volunteer centers, schools, community organizations, and by using the provided email template to contact nonprofits directly.

Q: Is there training available for school coordinators?

A: Yes. Volunteer Iowa provides a required orientation for all school coordinators. If requested, Volunteer Iowa will also work directly with schools or the organizations students may serve with to provide additional training on topics of interest.

Q: Can organizations verify volunteer hours through the Get Connected platform?

A: Yes. Organizations can approve hours that students report through the Get Connected platform, making documentation easier.

About Volunteer Iowa

Volunteer Iowa (The Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service) is part of a national network of state service commissions throughout the United States that foster bipartisan, state-level commitment to advancing service initiatives. The organization develops, communicates, and promotes a statewide vision and ethic of service.

Mission: To improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering.

Website: www.volunteeriowa.org

Contact Information

For Program Questions:

Volunteer Iowa
Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service
321 E. 12th St.
Des Moines, IA 50319

Phone: 515.349.4738 or 800.308.5987

Email: info@volunteeriowa.org

Website: www.volunteeriowa.org

For Technical Support with Get Connected:

Visit [Get Connected](#) or contact Volunteer Iowa using the information above.

Appendices

Appendix A: Email Template for Students to Connect with Volunteer Centers/Nonprofits

Below is an email template students can use to connect with Volunteer Centers and/or local nonprofits about service opportunities.

Subject: Inquiry About Youth Volunteer Opportunities

Hello [Name or Organization],

My name is [Your Name], and I am a student at [School Name]. I am interested in getting involved with service opportunities in our community and wanted to ask if your organization currently offers volunteer roles for high school students.

I am particularly interested in opportunities that allow youth to contribute meaningfully and build skills. I would love to learn what types of volunteer work you offer and whether there are roles that could align with my interests or strengths in areas such as [list a few examples—e.g., communication, technology, mentoring, organizing projects, art/design, etc.].

If possible, I would appreciate any information about:

- Volunteer opportunities available to youth
- Any age or training requirements
- Projects or tasks where youth volunteers can apply specific skills or take on responsibilities
- Upcoming events or ongoing needs where I could help

I am eager to contribute positively to the community and would be grateful for your guidance on how I can get involved. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Warm regards,

[Your Name]

[Your Contact Information]

Appendix B: Volunteer Reflection Questions

These questions are designed to help students engage more deeply with their service experience before, during, and after volunteering. While not required, these questions can help students prepare for the essay component of the Governor's Youth Volunteer Award.

Before Service

1. What is a cause you are interested in addressing through service?
2. How is this cause relevant to where you live?
3. What community organizations, clubs, groups, etc., are working to address this issue?
4. What do you hope to personally gain from this experience?
5. What type of service are you interested in engaging in through this experience (awareness, direct service, advocacy, or philanthropy)?
6. What skills or talents do you have that could benefit a community organization?
7. What would you like to learn or experience through service?

During Service

1. What have you done recently to make a difference? What have you liked/disliked?
2. What specific skills have you used?
3. How does your volunteer work address the community need you identified?
4. What challenges have you encountered, and how have you worked through them?
5. How are you making connections between your service and broader community issues?
6. What feedback have you received from supervisors or community members?

After Service

1. What surprised you through this experience? What did you learn about yourself, your community, or your cause?
2. What impact did your work have on this issue/community?
3. What continued work needs to be done to address this issue?
4. How has your understanding of the community need changed?
5. What skills did you develop or strengthen through this experience?
6. How might you continue addressing this issue or supporting your community in the future?
7. What advice would you give to other students interested in similar service?

Complete this survey from Serve Virginia to [identify your Volunteer Personality](#).

Appendix C: Hour Tracking Template

Student Name: _____

School: _____

Grade Level: _____

Academic Year: _____

Volunteer Hour Tracking

Date	Organization/Project	Supervisor Name	Activity Description	Hours	Supervisor Signature

Total Hours This Page: _____

Cumulative Hours (9th-12th Grade): _____

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

Notes:

- Only direct contact hours/hours on task count
- Students should make a copy of this form before it is submitted for their records
- For youth-led projects, all planning and implementation hours count
- Travel time does not count
- Court-ordered service may only account for 10 hours of total service
- Use back of this page for notes if needed

Appendix D: Sample Essay Rubric for Schools

Schools may use this rubric to help students understand essay expectations:

Governor's Youth Volunteer Award Essay Rubric

Criteria	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Satisfactory (2)	Needs Improvement (1)
Prompt 1: Service Description	Clearly describes service activities and the community needs addressed	Describes service with some detail about the community need	Basic description of service activities	Vague or unclear description
Prompt 2: Reflection	Deep, thoughtful reflection on personal growth, community learning, and service impact	Good reflection on the experience with some insight	Basic reflection on what was liked/disliked	Minimal reflection or insight
Prompt 3: Future Engagement	Specific, meaningful plans for continued community engagement	General ideas for future involvement	Vague mention of future service	No clear future plans mentioned
Writing Quality	Well-organized, clear writing with minimal errors	Generally clear with few errors	Some organizational issues or errors	Difficult to follow or many errors
Length & Format	250-400 words, paragraph format	Close to word count, mostly paragraph format	Slightly outside word count or format issues	Significantly outside requirements

Appendix E: Sample Student Essay

Note: This is a sample essay demonstrating the three required prompts.

Throughout high school, I completed 165 hours of volunteer service. The main issue I worked to address was food insecurity, which affects many families in my community more than I ever realized. I volunteered by sorting donations, preparing food boxes, and helping serve meals during weekly dinners. Eventually, I also created a youth-led service project focused on awareness by promoting the food pantry on social media.

Serving at the pantry taught me a lot about my community and about myself. Before volunteering, I didn't fully understand how many people struggle to afford groceries, even while working multiple jobs. I learned that food insecurity is connected to other challenges like high rent, medical bills, and lack of transportation. Meeting people facing these situations helped me see them not as statistics, but as neighbors who are doing their best under difficult circumstances. What I enjoyed most about volunteering was getting to know the families and regular visitors. I liked being able to brighten someone's day with a simple conversation. I am usually very shy but volunteering forced me to open up and I enjoyed getting to know more people. One thing that bothered me was misconception around who uses the food pantry. I wanted to make it more normal in my community and promote it as a resource for anyone. I did this through creating a social media campaign. I made graphics and videos to help get the word out about the pantry and collected stories from those we served to help normalize it.

Looking ahead, I want to continue supporting efforts to end food insecurity. I plan to stay involved in community service through college by joining service clubs and volunteering at campus food pantries. I also want to help organize food drives at my high school during my remaining months there. In the long term, I hope to advocate for policies that make healthy food more affordable and accessible. This service experience showed me that even small efforts can make a real difference, and it inspired me to keep contributing to my community wherever I go.

Appendix F: Program Timeline for Schools

August - September (Start of School Year)

- [Register your school to participate](#) in the program by September 30th.
- Participate in Volunteer Iowa's orientation on the program
- Inform local nonprofits of program, resources such as Get Connected, and inquire about potential service needs
- Promote the Governor's Youth Volunteer Award to all students (especially freshmen and seniors)
- Distribute program information, optional reflection questions, and establish internal deadline
- Set up hour tracking systems
- Remind continuing students to log hours from summer

October - December (Fall Semester)

- Check in with students about service progress
- Share volunteer opportunities through Get Connected
- Support students in finding quality service opportunities and provide oversight for youth-led service projects if needed

January - February (Spring Semester)

- Remind seniors about the upcoming essay deadline
- Provide essay guidelines and reflection questions
- Final push for seniors to complete remaining hours

March - Early April (Final Submission Period)

- Collect senior essays (set internal deadline)
- Verify all senior hours are entered and certified
- Review documentation for completeness

April (Submission Deadline)

- Submit the group application with all senior information and essays and names of students selected to attend statewide ceremony to Volunteer Iowa by April 20th.

June - Onward (Recognition)

- Attend the statewide ceremony in June/July
- Celebrate student achievement
- Reflect on program success and areas for improvement
- Update program materials as needed

Appendix G: Service Categories & Examples

Each service category includes a description and examples to help youth easily identify where their volunteer work fits. These examples are not exhaustive.

Animals: Activities supporting animal care, protection, or education.

Organizations/Example activities: Adoption days, animal shelters, aquariums, animal foster homes, therapy-animal programs, zoos

Community & School: Projects that improve the community or school environment.

Organizations/Example activities: Clean-ups, Chamber of Commerce, local government, schools, Boys & Girls Clubs, Scouts, Habitat for Humanity, Kiwanis, Rotary, libraries

Arts & Culture: Activities that promote or preserve arts and cultural experiences.

Organizations/Example activities: Cultural events, museums, tourism centers

Crisis Support: Helping people experiencing personal crises.

Organizations/Example activities: Children's hospitals, Make-A-Wish, St. Jude's, social services

Disaster Relief, Emergency & Safety: Support for communities impacted by disasters or activities that promote safety.

Organizations/Example activities: American Red Cross, fire/police departments, Volunteer Iowa disaster team, emergency management agencies

Education & Literacy: Supporting learning, tutoring, or educational programs.

Organizations/ Example activities: Coaching, library volunteering, mentoring, tutoring

Environment: Projects that protect or restore nature.

Organizations/ Example activities: Iowa DNR, land trusts, state/local parks

Health, Medicine, & Wellness: Activities that support health education or medical needs.

Organizations/Example activities: Cancer and heart associations, hospital volunteering, hospice, nursing homes, health campaigns

Homelessness, Housing, & Hunger: Support for people without stable housing or access to food.

Organizations/Example activities: Coat drives, food banks, homeless shelters, soup kitchens

Veterans, Military, & Seniors: Supporting active-duty military, veterans, or older adults.
Organizations/Example activities: Local nursing homes, American Legion, VFW, Wounded Warrior programs

Civic Engagement & Other: Leadership, advocacy, and community involvement.
Organizations: Youth advisory councils, nonprofit boards, government programs, advocacy clubs, Volunteer Iowa [youth service subcommittee](#)

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