

Guide for Merit Badge Counselors

The merit badge counselor is a key player in the Boy Scout advancement program. Whatever your area of expertise or interest—whether it is a special craft or hobby (basketry, leatherwork, coin collecting), a profession (veterinary medicine, aviation, engineering), or perhaps a life skill (cooking, personal management, communications)—as a merit badge counselor, you can play a vital role in stirring a young man's curiosity about that particular topic. By serving as a merit badge counselor, you offer your time, knowledge, and other resources so that Scouts can explore a topic of interest.

If you are not yet a merit badge counselor, it is easy to become a volunteer. You will need to register with the Boy Scouts of America, through your BSA local council. This entails contacting the local council, then obtaining, completing, and turning in the "Adult Application." The council will then process the application. (Every applicant is screened.)

Upon approval to serve as a volunteer, individuals are expected to complete BSA Youth Protection training within 90 days of assuming a leadership position. This training can be done through the BSA's Online Learning Center. The Boy Scouts of America seeks to create a safe environment for young people and adult leaders to enjoy the program and related activities. BSA Youth Protection training helps preserve that environment.

Understanding the Scouting Program

The Scouting program emphasizes helping young men develop character, citizenship, and mental and physical fitness. Among the handful of methods used to build on these aims of Scouting are adult association, leadership development, and advancement.

Besides parents and relatives, schoolteachers, religious leaders, and possibly coaches, most Scout-age youth don't have much contact with many other adults or professionals. A Scout's association with his merit badge counselors provides an excellent way for him to grow and gain confidence through exposure to quality adults who serve as positive role models and mentors to him. Meeting people from business and community leaders to trained specialists and enthusiastic hobbyists, a Scout can experience a chance for personal growth and a positive life-altering experience while in pursuit of a merit badge.



The Boy Scouts of America at a Glance

Since its founding in 1910, the Boy Scouts of America has maintained its purpose and mission to prepare youth to become responsible, participating citizens and leaders. Throughout the years, the Scout Oath and Law have served as the guiding light for BSA youth members.

To help carry out its mission, the BSA relies on more than 300 local councils. These service centers operate autonomously, sort of like franchises. Every local council has its own support staff and operates under the guidance of a Scout executive. To more efficiently serve its members, the local council is divided into districts, which are managed by district executives. The district executive serves as the grassroots contact between the local council and its volunteers.

Scout Oath

On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law; to help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight.

Scout Law

A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent.

A Merit Badge Counselor Is...

As a merit badge counselor, your mission is to join fun with learning. You are both a teacher and mentor to the Scout as he works on a merit badge and learns by doing. By presenting opportunities for growth via engaging activities like designing a Web page (Computers), performing an ollie and a wheelie (Snowboarding), or fabricating rope (Pioneering), you can pique a young man's interest in the merit badge subject. Just think: Your hands-on involvement could inspire a Scout to develop a lifelong hobby, pursue a particular career, or become an independent, self-supporting adult.

A Scout first expresses an interest in a particular merit badge by letting his unit leader know. To get him started, the leader may give him a signed Application for Merit Badge (blue card) along with the name and telephone number of a district/council approved merit badge counselor. The Scout then contacts the merit badge counselor and makes an appointment. The merit badge counselor sets a date and time to meet with the Scout and his buddy, and may suggest the Scout bring the merit badge pamphlet along with the blue card.

Most local councils (including summer camps) use the Application for Merit Badge, or blue card, although it is not required. This tool just makes the recordkeeping easier for the Scout, the merit badge counselor, and the unit leader. At summer camp, a Scout may receive partial credit for completion of a merit badge on the blue card, which goes to the Scoutmaster at week's end. Back home, the Scout would need to contact a merit badge counselor for assistance with completing the rest of the requirements.

At the first meeting, the Scout and his merit badge counselor review and start working on the requirements. In some cases, the Scout may share with the merit badge counselor the work he has started or accomplished. As the merit badge counselor, you and the Scout work out a tentative schedule for completing the requirements. You should consider both short-term and long-term goals, keeping other obligations (school, Scouting, sports, and so on) in mind, and set dates, times, and a location for future meetings. The number of meetings will depend on the difficulty of the requirements and the preparation and ability of the Scout.

Your duty is to be satisfied that each Scout who comes to you meets all the requirements for the merit badge you are coaching. You do this by helping Scouts overcome the different hurdles of the requirements and making them aware of the deeper aspects of the subject through their learning experience. You may tell about your own experiences to help positively reinforce the subject matter. However, you may not tack on new requirements or extra work. While you may guide and instruct a Scout on the subject matter, he must do the work himself.

As each requirement is completed, you will test the Scout individually, with his buddy present. If you are using a blue card, update this card as the Scout completes each requirement. When the young man has completed all the requirements, you sign off on the blue card and the Scout returns the completed card to his unit leader.



Summer Camp Merit Badge Counselors

The same qualifications and rules for merit badge counselors apply to council summer camp merit badge programs. All merit badge counselors must be at least 18 years of age. Camp staff members under age 18 may assist with instruction but cannot serve in the role of the merit badge counselor.

Helpful Hints

Here are some simple tips that every merit badge counselor should keep in mind.

Make the Scout feel welcome and relaxed.

Stimulate the Scout's interest by showing him something related to the merit badge subject, but don't overwhelm him; remember, he is probably a beginner. Carefully review each requirement, start with easy skills or questions, and encourage practice.

Insist that the Scout do exactly what the requirements specify. Many of the requirements involve hands-on activities that call for a Scout to show or demonstrate; make; list; discuss; or collect, identify, and label—and he must do just that.

Don't make the requirement more difficult—or any easier—than stated. A Scout may undertake more activities on his own initiative, but he cannot be pushed to do so.

During testing, the Scout might need help in a particular area or with a certain skill, and may need to be retested later to ensure the requirement has been fulfilled.

Encourage self-evaluation and self-reflection, and establish an atmosphere that encourages the Scout to ask for help.

Take a genuine interest in the Scout's projects, and encourage completion.

The merit badge counselor assesses the Scout's knowledge to ensure he has completed all the required work—no more, and no less. You may not add to, delete from, or modify the merit badge requirements in any way, although certain considerations can be made for Scouts with disabilities.

Frequently Asked Questions

Many of the same questions frequently arise from merit badge counselors, especially those who are new to the program. Here are the answers to some of those FAQs.

Question: Must individuals who are serving as a merit badge counselor register as a merit badge counselor with the Boy Scouts of America?

Answer: Yes, an Adult Application must be completed for each position in which the individual wants to serve. The application allows only one position per form. For instance, an individual who wants to serve only as a merit badge counselor will need to complete only one application. However, a Scoutmaster or assistant Scoutmaster who wants to serve as a merit badge counselor must complete two applications—one for the Scoutmaster position and one for the counselor position.

Question: Once the adult leader application has been submitted, how long does the approval process take?

Answer: The process usually takes from four to six weeks.

Question: What is the minimum age requirement for merit badge counselors?

Answer: An individual must be at least 18 years of age to serve as a merit badge counselor.

Question: Once a volunteer is registered and approved as a merit badge counselor, is that registration for life?

Answer: Approvals for merit badge counselors and all other adult volunteer positions are valid for one year only and must be renewed annually.

MyScouting.Scouting.org. BSA Youth Protection training helps preserve a safe environment for young people and adult leaders so that they can all enjoy the Scouting program.

Unit leaders are not automatically approved to serve as merit badge counselors.

Merit Badge Review

There are more than 100 merit badges in the merit badge program. Each one has a corresponding merit badge pamphlet, and the series is written with the 12-year-old Boy Scout in mind. In addition, the pamphlets are designed for a very broad audience of Scouts. The pamphlets are available from Scouting retailers, or may be ordered online at www.scoutstuff.org. To provide the Scouting experience to as many boys as possible, we consider the diversity of the Scouts we serve regarding region, economics, ethnicity, and social and religious background.

While the pamphlet is not required for the Scout to earn the merit badge, it helps the counselor to know what the Scout may be studying and the level of learning expected of the Scout. Many of the merit badge pamphlets contain suggested projects and other activities or demonstrations to help the Scout fulfill the requirements or to stimulate other ideas from the Scout and his merit badge counselor. Each book also contains a helpful resources section. For official requirements, the current-year Boy Scout Requirements book takes precedence. However, once a Scout has started working on a merit badge, he may stay with the requirements in effect when he started. He will not be required to meet newly introduced changes unless the BSA's National Council places a specific timeline on the implementation of new requirements.

Introduction to Merit Badges

You can learn about sports, crafts, science, trades, business, and future careers as you earn merit badges. There are more than 100 merit badges. Any Boy Scout may earn any merit badge at any time. You don't need to have had rank advancement to be eligible.

Pick a Subject. Talk to your Scoutmaster about your interests. Read the requirements of the merit badges you think might interest you. Pick one to earn. Your Scoutmaster will give you the name of a person from a list of counselors. These counselors have special knowledge in their merit badge subjects and are interested in helping you.

Scout Buddy System. *You must have another person with you at each meeting with the merit badge counselor.* This person can be another Scout, your parents or guardian, a brother or sister or other relative, or a friend.

Call the Counselor. Get a signed merit badge application from your Scoutmaster. Get in touch with the merit badge counselor and tell him or her that you want to earn the merit badge. The counselor may ask to meet you to explain what is expected of you and to start helping you meet the requirements. You should also discuss work that you have already started or possibly completed.

Unless otherwise specified, work for a requirement can be started at any time. Ask your counselor to help you learn the things you need to know or do. You should read the merit badge pamphlet on the subject. Many troops and school or public libraries have them.

Show Your Stuff. When you are ready, call the counselor again to make an appointment to meet the requirements. When you go take along the things you have made to meet the requirements. If they are too big to move, take pictures or have an adult tell in writing what you have done. The counselor will ask you to do each requirement to make sure that you know your stuff and have done or can do the things required.

Get the Badge. When the counselor is satisfied that you have met each requirement, he or she will sign your application. Give the signed application to your Scoutmaster so that your merit badge emblem can be secured for you.

The current Boy Scout Requirements book is available from your local Scouting merchandise distributor. It may also be ordered online at www.scoutstuff.org. Requirements for the Astronomy, Horsemanship, and Nuclear Science merit badge have extensive changes. Those with minor revisions include Archery (5, options A[f]2 and B[f]2) and Sports (2). Geocaching, Inventing, and Scouting Heritage are new merit badges.

The 2009 printing of the Boy Scout Handbook inadvertently included bugler as a position of responsibility under Eagle Scout requirement 4; it is not. The requirements in the 2011 Boy Scout Requirements book are correct and official.

Requirements. You are expected to meet the requirements as they are stated—no more and no less. You are expected to do exactly what is stated in the requirements. If it says "show or demonstrate," that is what you must do. Just telling about it isn't enough. The same thing holds true for such words as "make," "list," "in the field," and "collect," "identify," and "label."

The requirements listed here are the official requirements of the Boy Scouts of America. However, the requirements presented here might not match those in the *Boy Scout Handbook* and the merit badge pamphlets, because these requirements are updated only when the *Boy Scout Requirements* book is updated. The only significant difference is that as new merit badges are introduced, the requirements are posted here.

If a Scout has already started working on a merit badge when a new edition of the pamphlet is introduced, *he should continue to use the same merit badge pamphlet and fulfill the requirements therein to earn the badge.* He need not start all over again with the new pamphlet and possibly revised requirements.

Rank Advancement

Unit leaders and other Scouters often ask the same questions about the rank advancement program and board of review process. Here is a quick reference guide of answers to some of those frequently asked questions.

Question: What is advancement, and what role does it play in Scouting?

Answer: Education and fun are functions of the Scouting movement—as is the growth of our youth members—and make up the basis of the advancement program. As the Scout meets certain requirements, he may advance in rank. The Scouting program is designed to help young people have an exciting and meaningful experience. A quality Scouting program strives for the following:

- ▶ Every young person achieves personal growth.
- ▶ Each individual learns by doing.
- ▶ Youth members progress at their own rate.
- ▶ All young people receive recognition for their individual accomplishments.
- ▶ Youth participants are encouraged to embrace Scouting ideals.



Question: Rank advancement requires a Scout to demonstrate Scout spirit. How is Scout spirit defined and determined?

Answer: Scout spirit applies to how a Scout lives and conducts his daily life. He shows Scout spirit by being a role model to his peers, living by the Scout Oath and Law. The concept of Scout spirit is not based on how many Scouting events or outings a Scout attends, but rather by how he helps bring out the best in others as a reflection of his own character and attitude in his daily life.

Question: In the Scout Oath, what does the phrase "duty to God" imply?

Answer: Scouting has an ongoing commitment to encourage moral, ethical, and spiritual growth. While the Boy Scouts of America remains a nonsectarian organization, in the Scout Oath, "duty to God" reminds everyone that a Scout is reverent, and Scout leaders are expected to be a positive religious influence. The BSA believes that, to be the best kind of citizen as possible, a Scout must recognize his obligation to God. However, religious

instruction is the responsibility of the Scout's family and his religious institution.

Question: For the Star, Life, and Eagle Scout ranks, how is "Be active in your troop and patrol" defined?

Answer: A Scout is considered to be active in his unit if:

1. He is registered in his unit (registration fees are current).
2. He has not been dismissed from his unit for disciplinary reasons.
3. He is engaged by his unit leadership on a regular basis (Scoutmaster conference, informs the Scout of upcoming unit activities, through personal contact, and so on).

The Boy Scouts of America has a comprehensive religious recognition program, and Scouts are encouraged to earn the religious emblem of their faith.

The unit leaders are responsible for maintaining contact with the Scout on a regular basis. The Scout is not required to attend any certain percentage of activities or outings. However, unit leaders must ensure that he is fulfilling the obligations of his assigned leadership position. If he is not, then they should remove the Scout from that position.



Question: What is a board of review, and what is its primary purpose?

Answer: The troop committee conducts a board of review to periodically review each Scout's progress, from Tenderfoot through Life ranks, to encourage him, to learn whether he is enjoying his Scouting experience, and to evaluate the unit's effectiveness in conducting the Scouting program to benefit him. The review presents a good opportunity to monitor the Scout's advancement and keep him on track. It also gives unit leaders a chance to measure the effectiveness of their leadership. The troop committee appoints three to six individuals to conduct the board of review.

Question: How often is a board of review held?

Answer: Whenever a Scout completes all the requirements for any rank, from Tenderfoot through Life, he appears before a board of review. He does so after having a conference with his Scoutmaster. Note that when a Scout has completed all the requirements for a board of review and then requests to have a board of review, he may not be denied a board of review.

Question: What is an Eagle board of review?

Answer: The Eagle board of review is a bit different from other boards of review because it is the last major step for an Eagle Scout candidate. All his efforts peak at the Eagle board of review. It's akin to a job interview, but it allows the panel to determine whether the candidate is worthy of the recognition. The interview focuses on the Eagle candidate's attitude and his acceptance of Scouting's ideals.



Question: When must an Eagle board of review be held?

Answer: Once an Eagle candidate has fulfilled all requirements of tenure, Scout spirit, merit badges, positions of responsibility, the leadership service project, and the Scoutmaster conference, arrangements must be made for the Eagle board of review to take place within the following 90 days. With the exception of the Eagle board of review, all requirements for Eagle must be completed before the Scout's 18th birthday.

The Eagle board of review is not a test; nor is it used to review the Scout's rank or Scouting skills.

The board of review can be conducted up to 90 days after the Scout's 18th birthday. A board of review held between 90 and 180 days after that date must be preapproved by the local council; a board of review that falls after the 180 days have passed must be preapproved by the BSA National Council (Eagle Scout Service). When submitting the Eagle Scout Rank Application to the Eagle Scout Service, the candidate must include a statement by an adult explaining the reason for the delay.

Without this last important step, the candidate cannot advance to the Eagle Scout rank. To make this happen, it is important for unit leaders and others to get involved with this process and have a clear idea of what is required of the Scout to pass the Eagle board of review.

Exceptions (alternate rank requirements) are permitted in certain cases of Scouts with disabilities. See the chapter called "Scouts With Special Needs" in the Scoutmaster Handbook.

If extenuating circumstances exist, an Eagle board of review can be conducted after the six months following the candidate's 18th birthday. Special permission must be granted by the National Boy Scout Committee, through the Scout's local council. Extenuating circumstances are defined as conditions or situations that are totally beyond the Scout's control.

Question: Who decides how the Eagle board of review will be conducted?

Answer: Each local council decides at which level the Eagle board of review will be conducted (unit, district, council). Then the unit committee or the district or council committee responsible for the Eagle board of review decides how reviews will be conducted. The board of review for an Eagle candidate must have at least three members and no more than six members, all of whom must be at least 21 years of age. These members do not have to be registered in Scouting, but they must have an understanding of the importance and purpose of the Eagle board of review. However, the board must have at least one district or council advancement representative when conducted at the unit level. At the unit's request, this individual may serve as chair.

Question: How is the information from the Eagle Scout Rank Application assessed by the board of review?

Answer: The unit committee reviews and approves the Eagle candidate's record before his application is submitted to the local council. If a unit leader or unit committee member does not sign or approve his application, the Eagle candidate may still be granted a board of review. However, the failure to secure such a signature may be considered by the board of review in determining the Eagle candidate's qualifications.

Unit leaders, assistant unit leaders, relatives, and guardians may not serve as members of a Scout's board of review.



Question: How are the references of an Eagle candidate checked?

Answer: The references on the candidate's Eagle Scout Rank Application are contacted by the council advancement committee or a designated representative either by letter, form (the local council may have one for this purpose), or telephone. The council determines the method(s) to be used. The Scout is not responsible for collecting or returning any completed reference responses to be used by the board of review.

Question: About how long does an Eagle board of review last?

Answer: While a regular board of review will take about 15 minutes, an Eagle Scout board of review may last 30 minutes or more. At the review, each board member should have an opportunity to share a meaningful discussion with the Scout about important matters such as his goals, personal growth, and living up to the Scout Oath and Law in

Before listing his references on the Eagle Scout Rank Application, the candidate should secure the approval of those individuals he wants to include.

his everyday life.

Question: Is the Scout's unit leader allowed to attend an Eagle board of review?

Answer: Yes. The Scout's unit leader introduces him to the members of the board of review and may remain in the room, but he may not participate in the board of review. The board of review members may call on the unit leader to clarify a point in question. However, in no case should a relative or guardian of the Eagle candidate be allowed to attend the review, even as a unit leader.

Question: How many votes must a Scout receive from an Eagle board of review?

Answer: Because of the importance of the Eagle Scout Award, a unanimous decision must be reached when voting on the Scout's qualifications. If the board cannot reach a unanimous decision, the applicant, his unit leader, or the unit committee may request a new review.

Question: What happens when a Scout does not pass the Eagle board of review?

Answer: If the Eagle board of review does not recommend the candidate for advancement to Eagle, the board members tell the candidate why he has not met the requirements and explain why he does not qualify. They discuss with him how he might meet the requirements within a given period. If the Scout disagrees, they explain the appeal procedures to him. A follow-up letter is sent to the Scout confirming the agreements reached on the actions necessary for his advancement. If he chooses to appeal, he is provided with the name and address of whom to contact. His unit leader, parents, or guardian also may appeal the decision on his behalf.

Question: What is the appeals process for a Scout who is denied the Eagle Scout rank?

Answer: In ascending order, appeals are made at the unit, district, and local council levels. The final decision rests with the National Boy Scout Committee. Upon receipt of an appeal, the district or council advancement committee promptly reviews the request to determine the facts. This is done by interviewing all parties either individually or as a group. Any confrontation should be avoided. A written report containing all details must be prepared for the committee responsible for a decision or for forwarding to the National Boy Scout Committee, if necessary.

All appeals to the National Boy Scout Committee must be processed through the Scout's local council. A copy of his Eagle Scout Rank Application must be included when the appeal reaches the national level.

Question: What kinds of resources are there for more information about the advancement process?

Answer: A number of helpful items are available to anyone who wants to more fully understand the Boy Scout advancement process. Here are the most practical ones.

Every aspect of advancement procedures is discussed in the *Advancement Committee Guide Policies and Procedures* (No. 33088), which is updated and reprinted annually.

The Eagle Scout Service Project Workbook (No. 18-927) is required for completion of the Eagle Scout leadership service project. This workbook can be downloaded from the Internet in PDF format, to be printed and completed by hand, or in DOC or RTF format, to be completed on computer.

The Eagle Scout Rank Application (No. 58-728) is available online. The application must be printed and filled out by hand; it cannot be submitted online.

The Application for Alternate Eagle Scout Rank Merit Badges (No. 58-730) includes the guidelines for advancement to Eagle Scout rank for Scouts with disabilities. To download this publication online. Every troop leader should have a copy of the *Scoutmaster Handbook* (No. 33002). This indispensable resource is a Scoutmaster's and assistant Scoutmaster's best bet for guiding a Boy Scout troop and its patrols.

Resources

These resources may be helpful to individuals who are interested in serving as a merit badge counselor. These items are available through your local council service center or on the Web at www.scoutstuff.org.



A Guide for Merit Badge Counseling, No. 34532C

This tri-fold flier gives a well-rounded explanation about the merit badge program and spells out the counselor's responsibilities.



Merit Badge Counselor Orientation, No. 34542

Merit badge counselors in training can use this two-page resource as a quick reference.



Boy Scout Requirements (current year), No. 33215

This is the book for complete, official requirements for each merit badge, rank advancement, and special awards and recognitions. This booklet is revised every year and takes precedence over any other resource regarding rank and merit badge requirements.



Scoutmaster Handbook, No. 33009C

This resource serves as the Scoutmaster's primary guide and contains a helpful section about advancement, including the merit badge program. (See the "Advancement" chapter.)



Boy Scout Handbook, No. 33105

This is the Boy Scout's most vital source of information and encompasses all facets of Scouting, including a chapter on merit badges.



Application for Merit Badge, No. 34124A

Better known as the "blue card," this blue wallet-sized card shows that the Scout has permission to start working on a particular merit badge, records his progress, and, when

completed, provides a separate record for the Scout, the counselor, and the unit.



Merit Badge Counselor Information, No. 34405

Local councils use the information from this form to identify merit badge counselors, the merit badges they are willing to coach, and other pertinent information. This form also includes the merit badge counselor's agreement to follow the merit badge requirements, and other BSA policies. This form, available online in PDF format, should be submitted to the BSA local council along with the Adult Application.



Advancement Committee Guide Policies and Procedures, No. 33088D

This handbook is the bible for Scouters who are responsible for advancement at the council, district, and unit levels. The book contains the current BSA policies, procedures, rules, and regulations, as well as other information pertinent to Boy Scout advancement. It is updated periodically.



Adult Application (to Be a Scouting Volunteer), No. 28-501C

To serve as a merit badge counselor, an individual must complete and return this adult registration form. The Adult Application is valid for one year only and must be renewed annually. To register as a merit badge counselor, mark the box labeled "Council/district position" in the upper right-hand block with "merit badge counselor." Fill in the "Position Code" with code "42," and fill in the "Position (Description)" with "merit badge counselor." This application also is available in Spanish (No. 28-502Q).

Supplemental Training: Merit Badge Counselor Instructors Guide

This module, which may be reviewed online or used to conduct a training event, is designed to guide new and potential merit badge counselors through their responsibilities in the role and will give them an understanding of the methods of counseling Scouts. It is intended as a short orientation course for new merit badge counselors before they begin working with Scouts.