

National BSA Policies Related To Merit Badges



Responsibility for Merit Badges

Clause 13. The responsibility for merit badges shall rest with the merit badge counselor approved by the local council and district advancement committee. Merit badge counselors shall be registered adult members of the Boy Scouts of America. The merit badge counselor shall prepare and qualify youth members. There shall be no board of review procedure for merit badges, but public recognition may be given at a unit court of honor or other suitable occasion.



Approving Merit Badge Counselors and Publishing List of Counselors

The council advancement committee is responsible for approving merit badge counselors.

The council advancement committee reviews the district merit badge list and has it published at least once a year by the council service center. The list should include the current counselors' names, addresses, and telephone numbers. It should be mailed to every unit leader and commissioner, as well as printed in the council bulletin. (See section titled "[Merit Badges](#)" below.)



Recruiting and Training Merit Badge Counselors and Publishing Lists

The essence of quality Scouting is having sufficient qualified adult leaders. Nowhere does this become more apparent than in the recruitment of adults to serve as merit badge counselors. Because counselors must be knowledgeable in specialized areas as well as able to have a good rapport with Scout-age boys, the district advancement committee has a challenging task in recruiting, approving, and training merit badge counselors, and in helping units to do the same.

All counselors must have an understanding of their role in Scout advancement. The district advancement committee is responsible for making the appropriate counseling material available to the counselors and for providing the essential training to the counselors recruited by the units and by the district.

The Merit Badge Counselor and the Scout. The merit badge plan is based on the concept that a boy works with an adult knowledgeable in one or more fields, an experience invaluable to a Scout. The counselor introduces the Scout to subjects that may lead to a career choice or to a lifetime hobby.

Merit Badges for Eagle Palms. Any merit badges beyond those used to earn the Eagle Scout award, and earned before or after a Boy Scout earns the Eagle Scout award, may be applied toward requirement 4 for Eagle palms.

Recruiting Merit Badge Counselors. Setting up a district list of merit badge counselors may seem at first like a staggering job, considering that more than a hundred merit badges are offered. But it is not so difficult if the job is approached logically.

Step 1: Begin by using the *Work Sheet for Building a Merit Badge Counselor List*, noting the badges required for the Eagle Scout Award since they obviously are "musts".

Step 2: List the merit badges most popular in the district or council, referring to the copies of the past few council charter renewals. List the subjects that will require few counselors in the district or council; perhaps counselors for these merit badges can be shared with a neighboring district, or a counselor can be requested at the council level to service all districts. Troops and teams should provide as many counselors as they can. Do not add troop or team merit badge counselors' names to the district list unless the individuals agree to be included on the list.

Step 3: Merit Badges are grouped into logical fields of activity. The district advancement committee should appoint a head counselor for each group. The head counselor recruits individual counselors, using knowledge of his or her field and suggestions or qualified candidates obtained from the district advancement committee.

As the district advancement or council advancement committee works down the list in choosing head counselors, record the names of prospective counselors for specific subjects.

A Guide for Recommending Merit Badge Counselors is used to obtain names of prospective counselors at parents' meetings and from schools and universities, service clubs, religious institutions, government agencies, industries, armed services, and the chartered organizations.

Special attention must be paid to areas within a district or council where qualified counselors are scarce.

Qualifications of Counselors. Persons serving as merit badge counselors must be registered as a merit badge counselor with the Boy Scouts of America. They must be men and women of good character, age 18 or older, and recognized as having the skills and education in the subjects for which they are to serve as merit badge counselors, as well as the ability to work with Scout-age boys.

Register merit badge counselors by using the basic adult leader registration form. All merit badge counselors must be approved by the council advancement committee. Merit badge counselors are not required to pay a fee if they are only registered as merit badge counselors.

There is no restriction or limit on the number of merit badges an individual may be approved to counsel for.

There is no limit on the number of merit badges a Scout may earn from one counselor.

An approved counselor may counsel any Scout, including his or her own son, ward, or relative.

Training Merit Badge Counselors. All merit badge counselors must be trained in the aims of Scouting and in advancement procedures.

The district or council advancement committee should train counselors, either as a group or individually.

A head counselor is an excellent position to coach the persons he recruits by having a conference with them. This is perhaps the most effective training a counselor can receive.

If a formal course can be arranged through letters and phone calls from head counselors, the dividends are great. The counselors in each subject group will have much in common despite their different backgrounds, and they will enjoy meeting each other and discussing mutual interests and problems. They also will enjoy meeting professional and volunteer Scouters with whom they will be associated.

Merit Badge Counseling is a valuable booklet for all counselors and should be made available to them by the district or council advancement committee.

A unit of training, *Merit Badge Counselor Orientation*, is available for training merit badge counselors. It can be used for a one-on-one session with a new counselor or adapted to a group session. If desired, the orientation also can be conducted as part of other Boy Scout training.

Maintaining a Current List of Merit Badge Counselors. The district or council advancement committee's responsibility does not end with the recruiting and training of merit badge counselors.

The district or council advancement committee (or one member selected to oversee counselors) will follow through to be sure that the merit badge counselors are working effectively and that boys seeking merit badges are finding the help they need. The committee will give on-the-job coaching if a counselor is not doing well, and will be alert for signs of difficulty that might be mentioned by unit commissioners, Scoutmasters, Varsity Scout Coaches, or unit committee members. District advancement committee members should attend district roundtables and huddles to update the list of merit badge counselors and to receive feedback.

The district or council list of counselors should be reproduced for distribution to troops and teams. When changes are made, these should be sent promptly to the units (or listed in the council bulletin) so that all units have readily available the names, addresses, and phone numbers of counselors. Lists are updated at least once a year, usually when councils and districts reregister.

With good word-processing equipment or computer capabilities, these merit badge counselor lists can be easily maintained and updated so that units can use current information.

Merit badge counselors (Code 42) are registered with the local council. As with all council members, their registration must be renewed annually.

As part of the local council charter renewal process, the council advancement committee sends a letter to existing merit badge counselors who are to continue for another year. This provides the council an opportunity, at least annually, to assure their merit badge counselor lists are updated. This also is an excellent opportunity to not reregister those persons identified as not following the policies and procedures of the Boy Scouts of America.

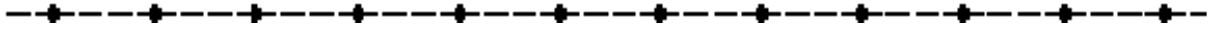
✦ Suggested items for the letter include:

- ◆ Thank them for serving.
- ◆ Tell them it's time to reregister.
- ◆ Tell them the merit badges they are approved to counsel in.
- ◆ Ask them if they wish to continue.
- ◆ Enclose a response card or form for them to use.

Troop and Team Merit Badge Counselors. As a practical approach to providing merit badge counselors, troop and team committees may establish their own lists of counselors, if necessary, at least for the required and more popular merit badges. The Troop Resource Survey, available from the

council service center, can be used to identify parents and others in the neighborhood who can serve as merit badge counselors.

All merit badge counselors, even those who serve only one unit, must be approved by the council and district advancement committee, and counselors must register as a merit badge counselor (see "[Qualifications of Counselors](#)" above). However, it is essential that a district have the most complete list of merit badge counselors that is possible. Thus, troops and teams should be encouraged to share lists of counselors willing to assist districtwide or councilwide.



Merit Badges

Earning merit badges gives a Scout the kind of self-confidence that comes from overcoming obstacles to achieve a goal. Through the merit badge program, a Scout also learns career skills, develops socially, and may develop physical skills and hobbies that give a lifetime of healthful recreation.

The steps to follow in the merit badge program are outlined in the current *Boy Scout Requirements*. This book lists the requirements a Scout meets to earn each of the more than 100 merit badges that are available. Scouts must be tested individually, and they must meet all the requirements.

No additional requirements may be added.

A merit badge cannot be taken away once it has been earned, provided the counselor is a registered counselor for the merit badge.

Scout Buddy System. A Scout must have a buddy with him at each meeting with a merit badge counselor. A Scout's buddy can be another Scout, a parent or guardian, a brother or sister, or a relative or friend. From his Scoutmaster, the Scout obtains a signed merit badge application and the name of the appropriate merit badge counselor. The Scout sets up his first appointment with the counselor. The counselor should explain the requirements to the Scout. The Scout and his buddy then meet as appropriate with the counselor until the Scout completes the badge's requirements.

Group Instruction of Merit Badges. The question arises as to whether it is permissible to have Scouts earn merit badges in groups. Many subjects may be presented to groups of Scouts without defeating one of the purposes of the merit badge plan -- working closely with a qualified Scout.

The National Executive Board has approved this policy statement on merit badge counseling:

"To the fullest extent possible, the merit badge counseling relationship is a counselor-Scout arrangement in which the boy is not only judged on his performance of the requirements, but receives maximum benefit from the knowledge, skill, character, and personal interest of his counselor. Group instruction and orientation are encouraged where special facilities and expert personnel make this most practical, or when Scouts are dependent on only a few counselors for assistance. However, this group experience should be followed by attention to each individual candidate's projects and his ability to fulfill all requirements."

In harmony with this policy, a troop or team may use merit badge counselors in unit meetings. The merit badge counselor can make a presentation covering the highlights of a merit badge subject.

Scouts should then be given an opportunity to try some skill related to the badge. This introduction to a merit badge can spark an interest in the subject.



Advancement in Summer Camp

In developing council procedures for handling Advancement Reports and distributing badges, remember that many Boy Scout advancement opportunities take place in summer camp. Special attention should be given to ensure that the procedures include summer camp.

The procedures for advancement in summer camp are established by the council advancement committee in cooperation with the committee responsible for summer camp, the camp director, and the program director. These procedures must be approved by the council advancement committee prior to the opening of camp. This procedure must include the four processes of advancement -- learning, testing, reviewing, and recognition.

The camp director will organize program staff, specialists, commissioners, and department heads in such a way that the program in camp is completely operative from the beginning of the camp season. These procedures should be given to each troop as part of precamp orientation.

The program director is responsible for assuring that all program equipment relating to advancement is available for use.

Camp staff members should be prepared and available to assist unit leaders in teaching and testing Scouts on Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class requirements.

Camp merit badge counselors must be qualified (see "[Qualifications of Counselors](#)" above). Camp staff members who are qualified in the subject and are younger than age 18 may assist the merit badge counselor with instruction. The merit badge counselor or instructor in a particular subject should be available to both individuals and groups. Because of the need for continued practice in some subjects, it will be necessary to meet candidates at a certain time each day. For other subjects, it may be necessary to meet as a group once or twice during the week.

Each counselor must maintain the exact standards as outlined in the merit badge requirements -- **nothing deleted, nothing added** -- and make himself or herself available at the time most convenient to the Scouts. Partial completion of merit badges should be credited to a Scout on the Application for Merit Badge and given to the Scoutmaster at the end of the week.

There is no time limit for completion of merit badges other than age 18.