

### 7.0.0.1 The Benefits of Merit Badges

There is more to merit badges than simply providing opportunities to learn skills. There is more to them than an introduction to lifetime hobbies, or the inspiration to pursue a career—though these invaluable results occur regularly. It all begins with a Scout’s initial interest and effort in a merit badge subject, followed by a discussion with the unit leader or designated assistant, continues through meetings with a counselor, and culminates in advancement and recognition. It is an uncomplicated process that gives a Scout the confidence achieved through overcoming obstacles. Social skills improve. Self-reliance develops. Examples are set and followed. And fields of study and interest are explored beyond the limits of the school classroom.

### 7.0.0.2 About the Application for Merit Badge (“Blue Card”)

It is important to note the “blue card” is the nationally recognized merit badge record. It has been updated from time to time and carries the information needed for proper posting and for evidence and reference as needed later. The card has three parts: the actual “Application for Merit Badge” portion, the “Applicant’s Record,” and the “Counselor’s Record.” It requires a total of four signatures—two each from the unit leader and a merit badge counselor. The unit leader signs first on the front of the Application for Merit Badge portion and gives the entire blue card to the Scout. See “The Scout, the Blue Card, and the Unit Leader,”

#### 7.0.0.3.

Typically after the unit leader signs the blue card, the Scout contacts the merit badge counselor and sets an appointment. Even though Scouts may benefit from reviewing requirements with a counselor before pursuing them, a boy may begin working on a merit badge at any time after he is registered. It is the counselor’s decision whether to accept work or activities completed prior to the issuing of the signed blue card. Common sense

should prevail, however. For example, nights already camped as a Boy Scout, or coins or stamps already collected, would count toward their respective badges. A merit badge counselor—once he or she is satisfied a Scout has met all the requirements—signs in two places: on the reverse of the Application for Merit Badge (to the left) and on the Applicant’s Record (in the middle). These two parts are returned to the Scout. The approving counselor should retain the part of the card called the Counselor’s Record for at least one year—in case questions are raised later. If the Scout did not complete all the requirements, the counselor initials those that were fulfilled in the spaces provided on the back of the Applicant’s Record part. This is called a “partial” (see “Partial Completions,” 7.0.3.3). Once a registered counselor signs that all requirements have been met, the Scout should meet with his unit leader to discuss his experience. The unit leader then signs the Applicant’s Record portion and returns it to the young man, who should retain it in his personal permanent records. For very large events—such as the national Scout jamboree—the National Council may approve an alternative format and sizing for the blue card. This is done through the National Advancement Team.

### APPLICATION FOR MERIT BADGE

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_  
is a registered Boy Scout Varsity Scout Venturer  
of \_\_\_\_\_ No. \_\_\_\_\_  
Troop, team, crew, ship  
District \_\_\_\_\_  
Council \_\_\_\_\_

I have discussed this merit badge with this Scout and recommended at least one merit badge counselor.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Signature of unit leader  
34124

*All merit badge requirements must be met while a registered Boy Scout or Varsity Scout, or a qualified Venturer or Sea Scout. Accomplishments before joining, or while a Cub Scout, do not apply.* In the event unit leaders or other volunteers discover that any merit badge counselors are not following mandated procedures regarding the use of blue cards or working with the requirements as they are written, they should complete and submit to the council advancement committee the Reporting Merit Badge Counseling Concerns form

(found in the appendix). Unit leaders should regularly review the policies and procedures related to the merit badge process with Scouts, parents, and leaders, and counsel them on proper methods as the need arises. *Though it may not have been clearly stated in the past, units, districts, and local councils do not have the authority to implement a different system for merit badge approval and documentation. In any case, through the years, many councils have created new forms and approaches to the process, some including IT components. In an effort to gather and consider these potential best practices, councils are now asked to submit descriptions and copies of their blue card alternatives to the National Design and Development Department.*

### **7.0.0.3 The Scout, the Blue Card, and the Unit Leader**

A few merit badges have certain restrictions, but otherwise any registered Boy Scout, Varsity Scout, or qualified Venturer or Sea Scout may work on any of them at any time. Before he begins working with a merit badge counselor, however, he is to have a discussion with his unit leader. That a discussion has been held is indicated by the unit leader's signature on the Application for Merit Badge, No. 34124, commonly called the "blue card." Although it is the unit leader's responsibility to see that at least one merit badge counselor is identified from those approved and made available, the Scout may have one in mind with whom he would like to work. The unit leader and Scout should come to agreement as to who the counselor will be. Lacking agreement, the Scout must be allowed to work with the counselor of his choice, so long as the counselor is registered and has been approved by the council advancement committee. However, see "Counselor Approvals and Limitations," 7.0.1.4, for circumstances when a unit leader may place limits on the number of merit badges that may be earned from one counselor. The Scout may also want to take advantage of opportunities at merit badge fairs or midways, or at rock-climbing gyms or whitewater rafting trips that provide merit badge instruction. This is also acceptable, but the Scout must still discuss the merit badge with the unit leader and get a signed blue card. Should a Scout want to change counselors, he should once

again speak with the unit leader to verify that the counselor is properly registered and approved. Whatever the source, all merit badge counselors must be registered and approved for the merit badges they counsel. See "Counselor Approvals and Limitations," 7.0.1.4, and "Registration and Reregistration," 7.0.1.5. A unit leader should consider making more of the process than just providing a signature. The opportunity exists to provide inspiration and direction in a young man's life. Preliminary merit badge discussions can lead to conversations about talents and interests, goal setting, and the concept of "challenge by choice." The benefits can be much like those of a well-done Scoutmaster conference. The discussion a Scout is to have with the unit leader is meant to be a growth-oriented and positive conversation. The unit leader should discuss any concerns related to working on the merit badge and provide appropriate counseling. It is then the Scout's decision whether or not to proceed with the merit badge. The process is intended to inform the Scout about what he may encounter along the way, and perhaps to give him suggestions on how the work might be approached. It also has the purpose of keeping the unit leader up to date with what the members of the unit are doing. *Because of the counseling opportunity involved, it is the unit leader's responsibility to sign blue cards. In the role of giving leadership to the delivery of the troop program, a Scoutmaster, for example, has a better opportunity than other leaders to get to know the youth. This background with the Scouts allows a unit leader to add greater value in the discussion and counseling intended to take place with the signing of the card. However, in circumstances when this may be impractical—for example, in large units or when the unit leader may be absent—the unit leader may delegate authority to sign cards and conduct the discussions. This authority should be entrusted to a knowledgeable assistant unit leader.*

## **7.0.1.0 About Merit Badge Counselors**

### **7.0.1.1 Qualifications of Counselors**

People serving as merit badge counselors must maintain registration with the Boy Scouts of

America as merit badge counselors and be approved by their local council advancement committee for each of their badges. This includes those working at summer camp or in any other group instruction setting, or providing Web-based opportunities. See "Counselor Approvals and Limitations," 7.0.1.4. There are no exceptions.

For example, Scoutmasters must register as merit badge counselors and be approved for any badge they wish to counsel or sign off in their troop. Before working with Scouts, counselors must have completed Youth Protection training within the last two years. They must be men or women of good character, age 18 or older, and recognized as having the skills and education in the subjects they cover. It is important, too, they have good rapport with Scout-age boys and unit leaders. *It is acceptable for a counselor registered in one council to approve merit badges for Scouts in another.*

*This is an important consideration, especially in areas where counselors are scarce, when Scouts are away from home and want to continue advancing, or when merit badge experiences include Web-based components provided by someone in another council.*

Several badges involve activities for which the Boy Scouts of America has implemented strategies to improve safety, enhance the Scouts' experiences, and manage risk.

These activities often require supervision with specialized qualifications and certifications. Merit badge counselors who do not meet the specific requirements may use the services of helpers who do. Additional details can be found below, and also in the *Guide to Safe Scouting* and the merit badge pamphlets.

General Supervision Requirements

- Swimming and watercraft activities must be conducted in accordance with BSA Safe Swim Defense or BSA Safety Afloat, respectively, and be supervised by mature and conscientious adults at least 21 years old and trained in the program applicable. Counselors for merit badges involving swimming or the use of watercraft must be so trained, or use helpers who are.

- All physical activities presented in any Scouting program must be conducted in accordance with

"The Sweet Sixteen of BSA Safety." These 16 points, embodying good judgment and common sense, can be found at [www.scouting.org/HealthandSafety/Sweet16](http://www.scouting.org/HealthandSafety/Sweet16).

- CPR instruction, wherever it is required, must be taught by people currently trained as CPR instructors by a nationally certified provider. Several such providers are mentioned in the *Guide to Safe Scouting*. The following merit badges have special qualifications or certifications for either the merit badge counselor or the supervisor of certain activities that may be involved. Counselors and advancement administrators should consult the merit badge pamphlets for details and to maintain awareness of changes and updates as pamphlets are revised.

**Archery.** Archery activities must be supervised by a BSA National Camping School-trained shooting sports director or USA Archery or National Field Archery Association instructor, or by someone who has been trained by one of the three; or alternatively, the activities may be supervised by someone with at least Level 1 training in the operation of an archery range from USA Archery, NFAA, or an equivalent.

**Canoeing.** Those supervising canoeing activities must have either BSA Aquatics Instructor or Canoeing Instructor certification from the American Canoe Association, American Red Cross, or equivalent; OR local councils may approve individuals previously certified as such, or trained by an instructor so qualified.

**Climbing.** All climbing, belaying, and rappelling exercises and activities must be supervised by a rock climbing instructor who is a mature and conscientious adult at least 21 years old, and who is trained in BSA Climb On Safely and understands the risks inherent to these activities. Training as a BSA climbing Level 2 Instructor is highly recommended. Someone with certification in First Aid/CPR/AED from the American Red Cross (or equivalent) must be present at these activities.

**Kayaking.** Those supervising kayaking activities must have formal training in kayaking and paddle craft instruction, evidenced by either BSA Aquatics Instructor or Paddle Craft Safety Instructor certification, or kayaking instructor certification from the American Canoe Association, British Canoe Union, or American Red Cross, or equivalent; OR local councils may

approve individuals previously certified as such, or trained by an instructor so qualified.

**Lifesaving.** Demonstrations or activities in or on the water must be supervised by an adult at least 21 years old with certification in Red Cross First Aid/CPR/AED or equivalent, and also as BSA Lifeguard or Aquatics Instructor or equivalent.

**Rifle Shooting.** The merit badge counselor is responsible for ensuring that all instruction or other activities involving any handling of firearms or live ammunition is consistent with state and federal law and supervised by a certified BSA National Camping School (NCS) shooting sports director, or National Rifle Association (NRA) Rifle Shooting Instructor or Coach.

Instruction or other activities involving handling Muzzle loaders must be supervised by an NCS shooting sports director or NRA/National Muzzleloader Rifle Association (NMLRA)-certified muzzleloader firearms instructor. Shooting must be supervised by an NRA certified Range Safety Officer (RSO). If instruction and shooting are to occur at the same time, both the RSO and qualified instructor must be present. The supervisor and instructor may not be the same person. Note that commercial shooting ranges may provide RSOs. See the *Guide to Safe Scouting* and the BSA *National Shooting Sports Manual*, No. 30931, for further details on shooting sports.

**Rowing.** Those supervising rowing activities must have either BSA Aquatics Instructor certification or equivalent; OR local councils may approve individuals previously certified as such, or trained by an instructor so qualified.

**Scuba Diving.** All phases of scuba instruction—classroom, pool, and open-water training—are limited to instructors trained and certified by one of the BSA's recognized scuba agencies as found in the *Guide to Safe Scouting*.

**Shotgun Shooting.** The merit badge counselor is responsible for ensuring that all instruction or other activities involving any handling of firearms or live ammunition is consistent with state and federal law and supervised by a certified NCS shooting sports director or NRA Shotgun Instructor or Coach. Instruction or other activities involving handling muzzle-loading shotguns must be supervised by an NCS shooting sports director or NRA/NMLRA certified muzzle-

loading shotgun instructor. Shooting must be supervised by an NRA-certified Range Safety Officer. If instruction and shooting are to occur at the same time, both the RSO and qualified instructor must be present. They may not be the same person. Note that commercial shooting ranges may provide RSOs. See the *Guide to Safe Scouting* and the BSA *National Shooting Sports Manual*, No. 30931, for further details on shooting sports.

**Snow Sports.** Activities in the field must be supervised by a mature and conscientious adult 21 years or older who is committed to compliance with BSA Winter Sports Safety as defined in the *Guide to Safe Scouting*.

**Swimming.** Demonstrations or activities in or on the water must be conducted according to BSA Safe Swim Defense and BSA Safety Afloat.

**Whitewater.** Those supervising whitewater activities must be certified as whitewater canoeing or kayaking instructors by the American Canoe Association or have equivalent certification, training, or expertise.

## All certifications listed above must be current.

The required qualifications above for merit badge counseling and supervision not only assist in managing risk, but also give counselors credibility. Scouts will see them as people of importance they can look up to and learn from. A well-qualified counselor can extend a young person's attention span: More will be heard and understood, discussions will be more productive, and true interest developed. The conversations can lead to a relationship of mutual respect where the Scout is confident to offer his thoughts and opinions and value those of his merit badge counselor. Thus it is that social skills and self-reliance grow, and examples are set and followed. *In approving counselors, the local council advancement committee has the authority to establish a higher minimum, reasonable level of skills and education for the counselors of a given merit badge than is indicated in "Qualifications of Counselors," 7.0.1.1. For example, NRA certification could be established as a council standard for approving counselors for the Rifle Shooting or Shotgun Shooting merit badges.*

### 7.0.1.2 Sources of Merit Badge Counselors

District or council advancement committees are charged with recruiting and training sufficient counselors to meet unit needs. As with any recruitment effort, it begins with prospecting: gathering names of people who may be qualified to serve. This can be done in a group setting through brainstorming as outlined in *Friendstorming On Tour*, No. 510-003, or considered on an individual basis. Merit badge counselor prospects are most often found from the following sources:

- Schools and colleges
- Parents groups
- Local businesses
- Service clubs
- Trade groups
- Religious organizations
- Neighborhood associations
- Government agencies
- The armed services
- Chartered organizations
- Nonprofit organizations such as the Boys & Girls Clubs of America
- Parents and guardians of Scouts

*A Guide for Merit Badge Counseling*, No. 34532, can be useful in recruiting. Visits to district meetings, roundtables, training sessions, and other events may also uncover prospects. While there, unit and district volunteer feedback may be sought on the quality of those currently active.

To learn more about Friendstorming, have your council call the national Design and Development Department at the national office. The booklet *Friendstorming On Tour* can be accessed at [www.scouting.org/advancement](http://www.scouting.org/advancement).

### 7.0.1.3 Venturing Consultants as Merit Badge Counselors

Venturing consultants are people whose special skills or talents are needed for a crew activity or project. Usually they are adults recruited on a one-time basis. More information can be found in the *Venturing Advisor Guidebook*, No. 34655. Consultants generally would be considered qualified to counsel merit badges related to their expertise. To do so, they must be approved and registered as merit badge counselors, according to the procedures below.

### 7.0.1.4 Counselor Approvals and Limitations

The council advancement committee is responsible for approval of all merit badge counselors before they provide services, although it is acceptable to delegate authority for this function to districts. The process should not be rushed to the point where unqualified counselors are allowed to serve. The National Council places no limit on the number of merit badges an individual may be approved to counsel, except to the extent a person lacks skills and education in a given subject. The intent is for Scouts to learn from those with an appropriate level of expertise. Merit badge counselors must submit the Merit Badge Counselor Information sheet, No. 34405, according to local council practices. The form must show each badge for which the counselor requests approval. Additions or subtractions may be submitted using the same form. It is permissible for councils to limit the number of badges that one person counsels. They must not do so, however, to the point where Scouts' choices, especially in small or remote units, are so limited as to serve as a barrier to advancement. The National Council does not place a limit on the number of merit badges a youth may earn from one counselor. However, in situations where a Scout is earning a large number of badges from just one counselor, the unit leader is permitted to place a limit on the number of merit badges that may be earned from one counselor, as long as the same limit applies to all Scouts in the unit. Approved counselors may work with and pass any member, including their own son, ward, or relative. Nevertheless, we often teach young people the

importance of broadening horizons. Scouts meeting with counselors beyond their families and beyond even their own units are doing that. They will benefit from the perspectives of many “teachers” and will learn more as a result. They should be encouraged to reach out.

### **7.0.1.5 Registration and Reregistration**

Merit badge counselors register at no fee, using the Boy Scouts of America’s standard adult registration form with position code 42. Designated members of the council or district advancement committee should provide the approval signature. The council advancement committee annually coordinates counselor reregistration. This may be done as part of the local council charter renewal process. A letter or message extending an invitation can be sent to each counselor who is to be approved for another year. Those identified as not following Boy Scouts of America policies and procedures, or not providing services as promised, should not be invited to return. *Volunteers who are properly registered as merit badge counselors can renew annually without completing a BSA adult application; their names will appear on the district roster for renewal. Anyone who is currently unregistered, or who is registered in another position but also desires to serve as a merit badge counselor, must complete an adult application.* The invitational message or letter could include the following:

1. Gratitude for service
2. Invitation to reregister
3. Reminder to maintain current Youth Protection training
4. Listing of merit badges each is currently approved to counsel
5. Contact name in the district or council who can provide assistance and information
6. Response card, e-form, or other way for counselors to return updated contact information, preferred method for contact, merit badges they wish to add or drop, updates to their skills and education profile, and anything else that may be helpful.
7. News and information regarding merit badge “midways” or “fairs,” counselor training opportunities, other activities or meetings of interest, and additional volunteer opportunities

8. FAQs or suggestions covering “best practices” for counseling
9. Recommendation to subscribe to the *Counselor’s Compass* by sending a SUBSCRIBE message to .

### **7.0.1.6 Training for Counselors**

The council or district advancement committee must assure counselors understand the Boy Scouts of America’s aims, methods, and mission. It is also important they know how Scouts can learn and grow through the merit badge process. To enhance the merit badge counselor experience, the National Advancement Committee’s Education Task Force has developed the presentation “The Essentials of Merit Badge Counseling.” It can be downloaded from [www.scouting.org/advancement](http://www.scouting.org/advancement), and viewed individually, featured in merit badge counselor training events, or delivered as part of a wider experience covering several levels of Scout leader training. Where a counselor corps is organized into groups based on the popularity or subject matter of badges, with “head counselors” for each group (see below), there is also an opportunity for “on-the-job coaching.” This is helpful where individual counselors need a better understanding of the merit badge plan. In multicultural communities, local councils should endeavor to offer bilingual training and mentoring.

### **7.0.2.0 Merit Badge Counselor Lists**

#### **7.0.2.1 Getting Started**

It is the responsibility of the council advancement committee to maintain a current list of registered and approved counselors, although this may be delegated to districts. To get started, the council advancement committee should consider organizing the badges into logical groups, such as business and industry, natural science, communications, and public service, and recruiting a head counselor for each group. Head counselors are not expected to be experts in each badge, but they should be capable of recruiting those who meet the qualifications. Remember that counselor recruiting is an ongoing responsibility. As new ones are added and others drop off, it is vital these changes be communicated to the district or council advancement committee.

The number of counselors needed for the list depends on badge popularity. First consider badges required for Eagle Scout rank, which are obvious “musts.” Next think about those most popular in the local area. Reports on merit badges earned can be generated at your council service center. For low-demand subjects, counselors may appear on more than one district list. Urge troops, teams, crews, and ships to make as many of their counselors as possible available district wide. The council or district counselor list is reproduced for distribution to troops, teams, crews, and ships. It is most efficient to set the list up as an electronic document that includes all counselors in the council. Establishing it as a spreadsheet or database can allow sorting for counselors willing to serve at the council, district, or unit level. It is important to maintain and update this list regularly so that users can depend upon it.

### 7.0.2.2 Web-Based Counselor Lists

Online counselor lists present a number of challenges. They should only be placed on official council websites that conform to the National Council guidelines at [www.scouting.org/Marketing/Resources/Council Web](http://www.scouting.org/Marketing/Resources/CouncilWeb). Give attention to protecting counselor privacy. Limit access to those who have merit badge-related responsibilities, such as advancement committee members and chairs, or unit leaders and selected assistants. Scouts should not have access. Their interaction with the Scoutmaster in discussing work on a badge, and obtaining a counselor’s name, is an important part of the merit badge plan.

### 7.0.2.3 Unit Counselor Lists

Units may establish their own lists of counselors, who may or may not opt to work with youth in other units. This may be necessary in wide geographic areas. It can also be helpful to have ready counselors for the most popular badges. Recognize, however, that Scouts learn from the perspectives of counselors outside their own troop. Note that all merit badge counselors, including those serving only one unit, must be registered and be approved by the council (or district, if authorized) advancement committee. Due to concerns about merit badge counselor privacy, and since Scouts should receive the names and contact information from the

Scoutmaster, unit counselor lists should not be made available to Scouts online.

## 7.0.3.0 The Process of Counseling

Earning merit badges should be Scout initiated, Scout researched, and Scout learned. It should be hands-on and interactive, and should not be modeled after a typical school classroom setting. Instead, it is meant to be an active program so enticing to young men that they will want to take responsibility for their own full participation. If subject matter relates to a counselor’s vocation, meetings with youth might take place at an office or work site. Hobby-related badges are usually counseled at home. For others like Rowing, Rifle Shooting, or Geocaching, learning could occur in the field where special facilities or an appropriate venue are available. Once a counselor has reviewed the signed Application for Merit Badge, he or she might begin with discussions about what the Scout already knows. This could be followed with coaching, guidance, and additional meetings, not only for passing the candidate on the requirements, but also to help him understand the subject.

The sort of hands-on interactive experience described here, with personal coaching and guidance, is hardly ever achieved in any setting except when one counselor works directly with one Scout and his buddy, or with a very small group. Thus, this small-scale approach is the recommended best practice for merit badge instruction and requirement fulfillment. Units, districts, and councils should focus on providing the most direct merit badge experiences possible. Large group and Web-based instruction, while perhaps efficient, do not measure up in terms of the desired outcomes with regard to learning and positive association with adults. The health and safety of those working on merit badges must be integrated with the process. Besides the *Guide to Safe Scouting*, the “Sweet 16 of BSA Safety” must be consulted as an appropriate planning tool. It can be found online at “Scouting Safely,” [www.scouting.org/HealthandSafety/Sweet16](http://www.scouting.org/HealthandSafety/Sweet16).

### 7.0.3.1 The Buddy System and Certifying Completion

A youth member must not meet one-on-one with an adult. Sessions with counselors must take place where others can view the interaction, or the Scout must have a buddy: a friend, parent, guardian, brother, sister, or other relative—or better yet, another Scout working on the same badge—along with him attending the session. If merit badge counseling or instruction includes any Web-based interaction, it must be conducted in accordance with the BSA Social Media Guidelines

([www.scouting.org/Marketing/Resources/SocialMedia](http://www.scouting.org/Marketing/Resources/SocialMedia)). For example, always copy one or more authorized adults on email messages between counselors and Scouts. When the Scout meets with the counselor, he should bring any required projects. If these cannot be transported, he should present evidence, such as photographs or adult verification. His unit leader, for example, might state that a satisfactory bridge or tower has been built for the

## *Recommended Merit Badge Process*

- 1. The Scout develops an interest in a merit badge and may begin working on the requirements.*
- 2. The Scout discusses his interest in the merit badge with his unit leader.*
- 3. The unit leader signs a blue card and provides the Scout with at least one counselor contact.*
- 4. The Scout contacts the counselor.*
- 5. The counselor considers any work toward requirements completed prior to the initial discussion with the unit leader.*
- 6. The Scout, his buddy, and the counselor meet (often several times).*
- 7. The Scout finishes the requirements.*
- 8. The counselor approves completion.*
- 9. The Scout returns the signed blue card to his unit leader, who signs the applicant record section of the blue card.*
- 10. The unit leader gives the Scout the applicant record.*
- 11. The unit reports the merit badge to the council.*
- 12. The Scout receives his merit badge.*

Pioneering merit badge, or that meals were prepared for Cooking. If there are questions that

requirements were met, a counselor may confirm with adults involved.

Once satisfied, the counselor signs the blue card using the date upon which the Scout completed the requirements, or in the case of partials, initials the individual requirements passed.

Note that from time to time, it may be appropriate for a requirement that has been met for one badge to also count for another. See “Fulfilling More Than One Requirement With a Single Activity,” 4.2.3.6.

### **7.0.3.2 Group Instruction**

It is acceptable—and sometimes desirable—for merit badges to be taught in group settings. This often occurs at camp and merit badge midways, fairs, clinics, or similar events, and even online through webinars. These can be efficient methods, and interactive group discussions can support learning. Group instruction can also be attractive to “guest experts” assisting registered and approved counselors. Slide shows, skits, demonstrations, panels, and various other techniques can also be employed, but as any teacher can attest, not everyone will learn all the material. Because of the importance of individual attention and personal learning in the merit badge program, group instruction should be focused on those scenarios where the benefits are compelling.

There must be attention to each individual’s projects and his fulfillment of *all* requirements. We must know that every Scout—actually and *personally*—completed them. If, for example, a requirement uses words like “show,” “demonstrate,” or “discuss,” then every Scout must do that. It is unacceptable to award badges on the basis of sitting in classrooms *watching* demonstrations, or remaining silent during discussions. It is sometimes reported that Scouts who have received merit badges through group instructional settings have not fulfilled all the requirements. To offer a quality merit badge program, council and district advancement committees should ensure the following are in place for all group instructional events.

- A culture is established for merit badge group instructional events that partial completions are acceptable expected results.
- A guide or information sheet is distributed in advance of events that promotes the acceptability of partials, explains how merit badges can be finished after events, lists merit badge

prerequisites, and provides other helpful information that will establish realistic expectations for the number of merit badges that can be earned at an event.

- Merit badge counselors are known to be registered and approved.
- Any guest experts or guest speakers, or others assisting who are not registered and approved as merit badge counselors, do not accept the responsibilities of, or behave as, merit badge counselors, either at a group instructional event or at any other time. Their service is temporary, not ongoing.
- Counselors agree to sign off only requirements that Scouts have actually and personally completed.
- Counselors agree not to assume that stated prerequisites for an event have been completed without some level of evidence that the work has been done. Pictures and letters from other merit badge counselors or unit leaders are the best form of prerequisite documentation when the actual work done cannot be brought to the camp or site of the merit badge event.
- There is a mechanism for unit leaders or others to report concerns to a council advancement committee on summer camp merit badge programs, group instructional events, and any other merit badge counseling issues—especially in instances where it is believed BSA procedures are not followed. See “Reporting MeritBadge Counseling Concerns,” 11.1.0.0. There must be attention to each individual’s projects and his fulfillment of *all* requirements. We must know that every Scout—actually and *personally*—completed them.

*It is permissible for guest speakers, guest experts, or others who are not merit badge counselors to assist in the counseling process. Those providing such assistance must be under the direction of a registered and approved counselor who is readily available onsite, and provides personal supervision to assure all applicable BSA policies and procedures—including those related to BSA Youth Protection—are in place and followed.*

### 7.0.3.3 Partial Completions

A Scout need not pass all the requirements of one merit badge with the same counselor. It may be that due to timing or location issues, etc., he must meet with a different counselor to finish a badge. The Application for Merit Badge has a place to record what has been finished—a “partial.” In the center section on the reverse of the blue card, the counselor initials for each requirement passed. In the case of a partial completion, the counselor does not retain his or her portion of the card. A subsequent counselor may choose not to accept partial work, but this should be rare. A Scout, if he believes he is being treated unfairly, may work with his unit leader to find another counselor. An example for the use of a signed partial would be to take it to camp as proof that the camp’s prerequisites have been met. Partial badges have no expiration except the Scout’s 18th birthday. Units, districts, or councils shall not establish other expiration dates for partial merit badges.

## 7.0.4.0 Merit Badge Miscellany

### 7.0.4.1 New Merit Badges

Suggestions for new merit badges may be sent to [merit.badge@scouting.org](mailto:merit.badge@scouting.org). Ideas are researched for relevance to the BSA mission and the needs of today’s youth and families. Subject matter must spark interest in Scout-age boys; thus part of the process involves presenting submissions to a youth panel.

### 7.0.4.2 Revising Merit Badges

Through a process managed by the National Advancement Committee, all merit badges are reviewed periodically to improve relevance, consistency, and also requirement and content accuracy. Merit badge counselors, unit leadership, parents, and youth are encouraged to send suggestions or comments to [merit.badge@scouting.org](mailto:merit.badge@scouting.org). *All submissions* are reviewed and considered as merit badges and pamphlets are revised. Feedback has been invaluable in correcting errors, updating material, and enhancing content.

### 7.0.4.3 What to Do When Requirements Change

The current annual edition of *Boy Scout Requirements* lists the official merit badge requirements. Once new or revised merit badge requirements appear in this publication, which is released each January, any Scout just beginning work on a merit badge must use the requirements as stated there. If changes to merit badge requirements are introduced in a revised merit badge pamphlet after the January release of the *Boy Scout Requirements* book, then the Scout has until the following January 1 to decide what to do. He may continue—or begin work—using the old merit badge requirements and the old pamphlet; or he may switch to—or begin work—using the new requirements and the new pamphlet. Unless it is otherwise stated in the merit badge pamphlet, *Boy Scout Requirements*, or official communications from the National Council, if a Scout chooses to use the old merit badge requirements and pamphlet, he may continue using them until he has completed the badge. There is no time limit between starting and completing a badge, although a counselor may determine so much time has passed since any effort took place that the new requirements must be used. *The authoritative source for all merit badge requirements is the current year's Boy Scout Requirements book.*

#### **7.0.4.4 Discontinued Merit Badges**

Scouts are not allowed to begin work on discontinued merit badges. If actual and purposeful effort that is more than simply incidental to participation in Scouting activities has already begun by the time discontinuation becomes effective, and work actively continues, then the badge may be completed and can count toward rank advancement. However, presentation of the badge itself will be subject to availability. It is a misconception that discontinued merit badges may be earned as long as the patch and requirements can be found.

#### **7.0.4.5 Earning Eagle-Required Merit Badges for Star or Life Rank**

Candidates for Star or Life, in the selection of “any four” or “any three,” respectively, of the merit badges required

for Eagle, may choose from all those listed, including where alternatives are available: Emergency Preparedness OR Lifesaving; Cycling OR Hiking OR Swimming; and

Environmental Science OR Sustainability. For example, if a Scout earns Cycling, Hiking, and Swimming, all three of them count as Eagle-required for Life rank. Only one, however, would serve toward the required merit badges for the Eagle Scout rank. The other two would count toward the optional merit badges required to make up the total of 21 merit badges.

Note that Star and Life requirements each allow two non-Eagle-required merit badges. It is the Scout’s decision, however, to earn more—or all—of his Star and Life badges from the Eagle-required list.

#### **7.0.4.6 Once It Is Earned, It’s Earned**

A Scout who has *earned* a merit badge from a registered and approved counselor by actually and personally fulfilling the requirements as written will have met the purpose of the merit badge program and the contribution to the aims of Scouting. The badge is his to keep and count toward his advancement. See “Personal Growth Is the Primary Goal,” 2.0.0.3. The same holds true if a Scout, without intent to violate national BSA procedures or policies, fulfills merit badge requirements with someone who is not registered and approved as a counselor. This could happen, for example, if a Scout, in good faith, contacts someone who has inadvertently been dropped from a unit or district charter or otherwise has an expired membership, but who remains on an approved list of counselors. In cases where it is discovered that unregistered or unapproved individuals are signing off merit badges, this should be reported to the council or district advancement committee so they have the opportunity to follow up. But it is also the responsibility of unit leaders to help Scouts understand that only registered and approved counselors are to be used. Because background checks, Youth Protection training, and merit badge program quality control are involved, BSA registration and council advancement committee approval are mandated procedures. If a Scout to whom this mandated procedure has been made clear has ignored it, then unit leaders may require the youth to work with other counselors who are properly documented who will verify that requirements were met and sign the blue cards. A unit leader should discuss any potential follow-up counselors with the Scout and provide the name of at least one, but Scouts

must be allowed to work with registered and approved counselors of their choice as outlined in “About the Application for Merit Badge (“Blue Card”),” 7.0.0.2.

#### **7.0.4.7 Limited Recourse for Unearned Merit Badges**

From time to time, it may be discovered that merit badges could not actually have been *earned*. For example, a Scout who returns from summer camp or a merit badge fair with signed blue cards for an extraordinary number of badges could raise concerns. If, after consulting with those involved in the merit badge program—such as an event coordinator, the camp director, or a merit badge counselor—it becomes plainly evident that a youth could not have actually and personally fulfilled requirements as written, then the *limited* recourse outlined below is available. It may result in a decision that some or all of the requirements for a badge could not have been fulfilled, and thus, that the badge was not actually earned. After such a consultation, the unit leader, in a positive environment similar to that of a unit leader conference, discusses with the Scout the circumstances under which a merit badge in question was approved. A parent or an assistant unit leader should attend as an observer. The young man *shall not be retested* on the requirements, but a conversation with him can reveal if he was present at the class and actually and personally fulfilled all the requirements. Such a discussion could cover who taught a class, what sort of activities took place, where and when they occurred, how testing was done, what the Scout might have brought home from the class, and other similar process-oriented details. In most cases, with a fair and friendly approach, a young man who did not complete the requirements will admit it. Short of this, however, if it remains clear under the circumstances that some or all of the requirements *could not* have been met, then the merit badge is not reported or awarded, and does not count toward advancement. The unit leader then offers the name of at least one other merit badge counselor through whom any incomplete requirements may be finished. Note that in this case a merit badge is not “taken away” because, although signed off, it was never actually earned. Just as we avoid penalizing Scouts for the mistakes of adults, it should be a rare occurrence that a unit leader finds the need to question whether merit

badges have been earned. This procedure for recourse is limited and reserved only for clear and evident cases of non-completion or nonparticipation. For example, the recourse could be allowed when it would *not have been possible* to complete a specific requirement at the location of the class, event, or camp; if time available was not sufficient—perhaps due to class size or other factors—for the counselor to observe that each Scout personally and actually completed all the requirements; if time available was insufficient for a “calendar” requirement such as for Personal Fitness or Personal Management; or if multiple merit badges in question were scheduled at the same time. This procedure is not to be viewed as an opportunity for retesting on requirements, for interjecting another set of standards over those of a merit badge counselor, or for debating issues such as whether a Scout was strong enough, mature enough, or old enough to have completed requirements. Unit leaders who find it necessary to make use of this recourse must act quickly—if possible, within 30 days of discovery. It is inappropriate to delay a Scout’s advancement with anything less than a prompt decision.

If a Scout or his parent or guardian believes a unit leader has incorrectly determined a Scout has not earned a merit badge, or more than 30 days have passed without a reasonable explanation for the lack of a decision, they should address their concerns with the unit committee. They should first, however, develop a thorough understanding of the merit badge requirements and that each one must be passed exactly as it is set forth. Upon encountering any merit badge program where BSA standards are not upheld, unit leaders are strongly encouraged to report the incident to the council advancement committee, preferably using the form found in the appendix (see “Reporting Merit Badge Counseling Concerns,” 11.1.0.0).

#### **7.0.4.8 Unofficial Worksheets and Learning Aids**

Worksheets and other materials that may be of assistance in earning merit badges are available from a variety of places including unofficial sources on the Internet and even troop libraries. Use of these aids is permissible as long as the materials can be correlated with the current requirements that Scouts must fulfill. Completing “worksheets” may

suffice where a requirement calls for something in writing, but this would not work for a requirement where the Scout must discuss, tell, show, or demonstrate, etc. Note that Scouts shall not be required to use these learning aids in order to complete a merit badge.

#### **7.0.4.9 Merit Badge Opportunities With Non-Scouting Organizations or Businesses**

There may be opportunities for Scouts to earn merit badges through participation in activities presented by organizations or businesses not affiliated with the BSA. Zoos, museums, recreation centers, major home improvement stores, and even individuals may be involved. There are, however, a number of important considerations council advancement committees should keep in mind.

It is permissible for outside organizations or businesses to present various programs where fulfilling merit badge requirements is *incidental*. For example, a youth recreation center or school could present a basketball camp for the purpose of teaching basketball skills—even charge a participation fee—and mention in promotional material that participating boys may fulfill some of the requirements for the Sports merit badge. That some merit badge requirements might be fulfilled during such an activity does not make it a *Scouting* activity, so therefore the activity would not require BSA approval. A registered and approved merit badge counselor, however, would have to sign off on each requirement passed. Even when merit badge opportunities are incidental to the programs presented, outside organizations are not allowed to use protected BSA trade names, images, logos, or artwork without the express written consent of the National Council, BSA. If registered and approved merit badge counselors are available within the organization, then merit badge blue cards may be signed according to BSA policies and procedures. That counselors are present, however, and blue cards may be signed, does *not* make the program a Scouting activity. Outside organizations and businesses are not allowed to present classes, events, or similar activities that are largely for the purpose of offering merit badges—even if no fee is involved—without approval from the local council. For example, the recreation center mentioned above would not be allowed to

present a “Sports merit badge camp” without permission. A written agreement should be involved in approving such a merit badge opportunity. The council must assure compliance with applicable BSA policies and procedures, including those related to Youth Protection and safety, National Council

consent to use protected brand images, and the merit badge counseling and approval process. The council advancement committee should be involved in the approval. However, because there are issues beyond advancement, the Scout executive should be the one to grant final permission. Council approval should not be granted if it is believed merit badge opportunities will generate a profit or revenue that is surplus to recovering costs related to presenting the opportunity.

#### **7.0.4.10 Charging Fees for Merit Badge Opportunities**

Council, district, and multiunit merit badge fairs have become increasingly popular over the past several years. While they provide a service to our Scouts, they should not be presented as fundraisers. There are many other methods available to raise the funds necessary to operate the Scouting programs at any level. Although charging fees for merit badge fairs, clinics, or similar events is not prohibited, any fees charged should be limited to recovering the costs related to presenting the opportunity. Local councils and districts may also include in the fee a reasonable contribution to the council’s overhead and administrative costs. Using merit badge events as fundraisers, however, is discouraged, and councils may exercise their authority not to approve them. In considering whether to approve outside organizations, businesses, or individuals for the presentation of merit badge opportunities, the same limitations should be placed on fees. Any fees should cover only those costs directly related to presenting the opportunity. Such costs could include wages an organization or business pays to employees who present classes. However, if employees are to serve as merit badge counselors and sign blue cards, they must take Youth Protection training, become registered, submit to a background check, and be approved by the council advancement committee.

The Boy Scouts of America is proud of its tradition of volunteer service. It does not endorse merit badge opportunities where fees are paid directly

to individuals, or to groups of individuals, especially if the individuals are looking to Scouting as a source of income that could be considered taxable. The council advancement committee should not approve merit badge counselors who will not honor the tradition of volunteer service.

### **7.0.4.11 About Merit Badge**

#### **Prerequisites**

Some merit badges appear to have “prerequisites.” The Emergency Preparedness merit badge, for example, requires the earning of the First Aid merit badge. But since the requirement does not state that First Aid must be earned *before* beginning work on the other Emergency Preparedness requirements, it is not, by definition, a prerequisite. It is just another requirement. Even though “Earn the First Aid Merit badge” is the first requirement, it need not be the first requirement fulfilled. It is just that the Emergency Preparedness merit badge is not finished until after the First Aid merit badge is completed.

The First Aid merit badge, too, has a requirement that reads a little like a prerequisite. It calls for current knowledge of the first-aid requirements for Tenderfoot through First Class ranks. It would make sense that a counselor and a Scout would explore this knowledge first, but doing so is not mandated. Other requirements could be learned and tested before this one. On the other hand, the Swimming merit badge, for all practical purposes, is a very real prerequisite for the Scuba Diving merit badge. Requirement 2 for Scuba Diving clearly states that the Scout must earn the Swimming merit badge before completing the remaining requirements