

## WELCOME TO MERIT BADGE COUNSELING

A guide for new merit badge counselors by Grand Canyon Council Advancement Committee, BSA

A merit badge counselor serves as both a teacher and mentor as Scouts work on a merit badge. In one way, he or she is an examiner. In a larger sense, the counselor uses this opportunity for coaching – helping young men overcome the hurdles of the different requirements and making Scouts aware of the deeper aspects of the subject from their knowledge and experience. Because of these unique opportunities to serve Scouts, volunteering as a merit badge counselor is one of the most gratifying experiences for adults in Scouting today.

The Grand Canyon Council Advancement Committee expects all merit badge counselors to be trained and understand the BSA merit badge process and policies. The following is a short explanation of both.

### What is a Merit Badge Counselor?

In order to serve as a merit badge counselor an individual must:

- Be 18 years old.
- Be qualified to counsel the respective merit badges. Some merit badges, such as rifle, shotgun shooting and Scuba Diving require special certification.
- Be properly registered as an adult merit badge counselor on the District (not Unit) charter.
- Have completed Youth Protection Training within the last two years. YPT must be renewed at least every two years
- Have good rapport with Scout-age youths.
- Be an individual of good character.

### How to Become a Merit Badge Counselor

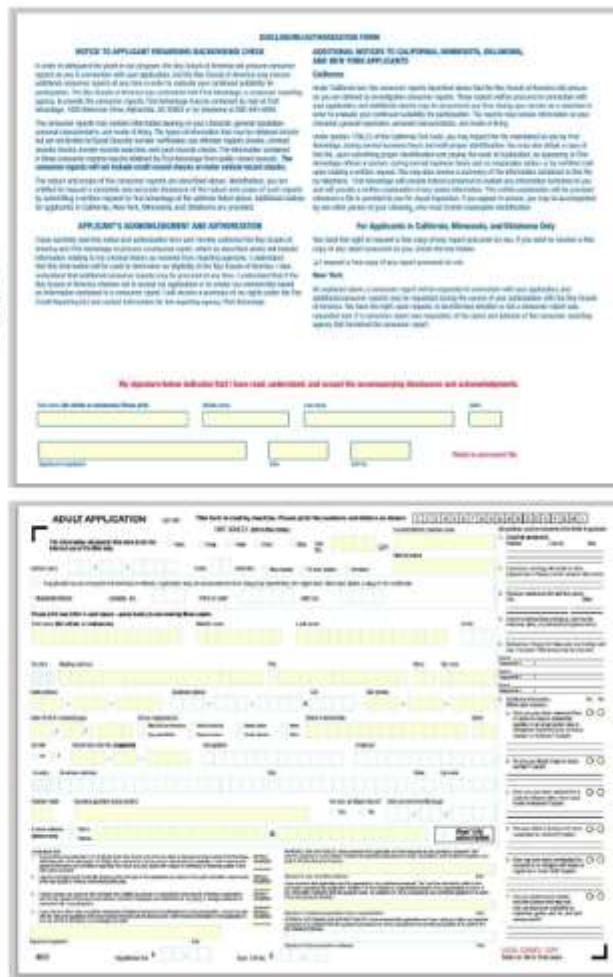
Unit leaders are not automatically merit badge counselors. You must register for the specific merit badges you will be teaching. Three registration forms are required:

1. The adult leader registration form. Code "42" is used as the position code for merit badge counselors. There is no charge for registration. You will need an [adult leader registration form, including the disclosure form](#); the adult leader registration form is available in the forms page of the council website [www.grandcanyonbsa.org](http://www.grandcanyonbsa.org). Only the applicant needs to sign the adult leader registration form. Since a merit badge counselor is a district position it is countersigned and accepted at council. An original hard copy of the Adult leader registration form can be obtained from your unit Committee Chairperson.
2. [The merit badge counseling application form](#). This form indicates the merit badges for which the individual will counsel. **There is a 20 badge limit to the number of merit badges that one individual can sign up to counsel**, AND they must be qualified to do the counseling and have an enthusiasm for the subject. Please review the Merit Badge Counselor [Special Qualification Guidelines](#) which is located along with the counseling application form at the [Grand Canyon Council forms page](#) for more information.
3. A copy of the Certificate of Completion of Youth Protection Training. Youth Protection training is completed by going on-line to [www.myScouting.org](http://www.myScouting.org) and creating a personal profile (if you do not already have a personal profile). You do not need your BSA I.D. number to create your profile. This can be added later and should be added later to ensure that all training records are automatically transferred to the Grand Canyon Council. After the registration has been completed by Grand Canyon Council the personal BSA I.D. number will be sent to the new applicant. Take the appropriate Youth Protection Training on-line and print out the certificate of completion. Attach a copy of the certificate of completion to the other application forms. No application will be accepted without a current certificate of completion. Youth Protection Training must be updated every two years.

All Merit Badge Counselor applications need at least 4 parts. The application filled out completely and signed by you, the Disclosure signed, Information Sheet and a YPT certificate. Additional Certifications are required for Climbing, Shooting, and Water activities.



The image shows a 'Way Scouts of America MERIT BADGE COUNSELOR APPLICATION' form and a 'Youth Protection Training' certificate. The form includes fields for Name, Address, Email, and various checkboxes for qualifications. The certificate, signed by John Q. Scouter, certifies completion of the Youth Protection Training course on 6/16/2015.



The image shows an 'ADULT APPLICATION' form and an 'INFORMATION SHEET TO COUNCIL MEMBERS, LEADERS, AND NEW TIME APPLICANTS'. The application form includes sections for personal information, references, and a statement of intent. The information sheet provides details about the application process and the responsibilities of a Merit Badge Counselor.

## Registration Turn-in Procedures

Two options are available.

1. All required registration documents can be scanned and emailed to: [gcc.membership@scouting.org](mailto:gcc.membership@scouting.org) (Please note that some districts may request that you send the registration documents to them first.) Received registrations will be reviewed for completeness. Once verified the individual's information will be entered into the council records.
2. Registration forms can be turned in the Council Service Center.

## Get Trained

1. All merit badge counselors need to take Merit Badge Counselor Training: (this is policy and process training not skill training and takes approximately 1 hour)
  1. Log into <http://my.scouting.org>
  2. Click on BSA Learn Center picture on the right
  3. Click on Program Specific Training
  4. Click on Boy Scouting or Scouts, BSA
  5. Click on Merit Badge Counselor Training
  6. There are two major training programs that need to be completed:
    - Merit Badge Counselor - Position Trained
    - Merit Badge Counselor - Before the First Meeting
2. Another Merit badge counselor guide is available here: <https://filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-065.pdf>

## Review of Proper Merit Badge Counseling Procedures

- NOTE: Merit Badge Applications (aka Blue Cards) must be used in this process, units, districts, and local councils do not have the authority to implement a different system for merit badge approval and documentation.
- The Scout selects a merit badge he is interested in.
- The Scout meets with the Scoutmaster (or his designee; i.e. assistant Scoutmaster for 11 year old Scouts) who by signing shows that the Scout and the unit leader have had the discussion about the badge and that the leader has recommended at least one registered merit badge counselor. The unit leader's signature is required on the application before the Scout begins working with the merit badge counselor. This does not mean the young man must wait for the signature to begin work on the merit badge itself. For example, past campouts count for the Camping merit badge, and coins and stamps already collected count for those badges.

### The Blue Card

### The Blue Card – Reverse Side

- A name and contact information of a registered merit badge counselor is to be provided to the Scout by the Scoutmaster when the Scoutmaster signs the blue card. There is a place on the card to put it. The Scoutmaster must make certain that the recommended counselor is properly registered and current with YPT. This is accomplished by consulting the official merit badge counselor list maintained by council.
- The Scout contacts the merit badge counselor, probably by phone. The counselor will tell him what is expected of him over the phone, or the counselor may want to make an appointment to discuss this with the Scout face-to-face. Personal contact will make earning the badge a better experience for both the Scout and the counselor.
- When you work with a Scout, there must always be another adult with the Scout. This person can be a registered adult or the Scout's parent or legal guardian.
- The Scout meets with the merit badge counselor to set forth a plan to accomplish fulfilling ALL of the requirements of the merit badge. On his first visit, the Scout should bring a merit badge application signed by his unit leader.
- The Scout begins work on the merit badge. It is possible that some work will have been completed by the Scout prior to meeting with the counselor. Any prior work should be discussed with the counselor. This would include work done through uncompleted merit badges from summer camp, merit badges

## The Merit Badge Process



started at a merit badge clinic, or work done independently by the Scout in advance of meeting with a counselor.

9. The number of meetings that the Scout meets with the MB counselor depends on the plan decided upon when the Scout first meets with the counselor.
10. Any review session might be approached by the Scout with some apprehension. He is familiar with final exams in school and may see this meeting with you as another such experience. You can help by putting him at ease. Talk with him rather than grill or examine him; there is a big difference, yet you can still find out what he knows. Express honest enthusiasm for the things he has done, particularly if projects are involved. Your approval will give the Scout confidence.
11. When he meets with you, he should bring with him the projects required for completion. If these cannot be transported, he should present satisfactory evidence, such as a photograph of the project or adult verification. Counselors agree not to assume prerequisites 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. Your responsibility, in addition to coaching, is to satisfy yourself that the requirements have been met. Question the Scout and, if you have any doubts, contact the adult who signed the statement.
12. To pass a merit badge requirement, the Scout is required to do exactly what the requirement says to do, no more, no less.
13. Worksheets [like you get from meritbadge.org] 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.
14. 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.
15. Upon completion of ALL the requirements, the counselor signs the blue card indicating satisfactory completion of ALL requirements. The counselor cannot increase or decrease the stated merit badge requirements. A counselor may initial on the blue card completion of individual requirements. In case there is a change in merit badge counselors prior to completion of all requirements the initialed items qualify for completion of that item and do not have to be further reviewed by a new counselor.
16. The counselor should retain his copy of the blue card for one year in case there are any questions.
17. The Scout turns the other two sections of the completed blue card into the Scoutmaster who has another conference with the Scout to determine how good of an experience the Scout had with the counselor. The Scoutmaster signs the applicant's section of the blue card indicating that the unit has received an approved merit badge application from the merit badge counselor and returns the applicant's section to the Scout at this time. This assures there is a copy in the hands of the Scout in case the unit loses the record. The unit copy is then given to the unit advancement chairmen who then processes the forms to purchase the badge and ensures that it is awarded at the next meeting.

### Common Myths About Merit Badges

- A Scout must complete a merit badge within one year.  
**False.** A Scout can continue to work on any merit badge until he reaches age 18.



- At least two Scouts must work together on a merit badge. This is called the "Buddy System".  
**False.** A change from the previous policy where a Scout only needed to be accompanied by a buddy, we are now requiring two 21 years old or older leaders. If the registered merit badge counselor is over 21 then a parent may substitute for the second registered adult.
- A Scout can only work on "X" number of merit badges at one time.  
**False.** He can work on as many as he desires beginning the day he joins the troop.
- A parent cannot be their son's merit badge counselor.  
**False.** While one of the purposes of earning a merit badge is to expose the Scout to association with other adults, it is possible for a parent to counsel their son (as long as he/she is a registered counselor for that badge).
- Similar tasks performed for one merit badge or rank advancement cannot be used for another.  
**False.** As long as the Scout has completed the task as stated in the requirements, he has completed the task. It doesn't matter if the task also counted for a different requirement in another merit badge or rank. If there is an exception to this guideline, the requirement will specifically state it.
- A Scout should have a signed blue merit badge application from his Scoutmaster prior to meeting with a merit badge counselor.  
**True.** The Scoutmaster should provide a list of valid counselors that have committed to working with the Scouts of his troop. The Scoutmaster must sign the application prior to this meeting. What do you do if a Scout shows up without a signature on his blue card? Ask him where he got the card. If the Scout indicates the unit leader knew of his desire to begin working on the badge, but forgot to sign—or if there are other compelling extenuating circumstances—you may proceed with the initial session and ask him to get his unit leader's signature prior to the next meeting.
- Merit badge counselors have a lot of leeway as to deciding if a requirement has truly been completed.  
**True.** No tasks should be added to or deleted from the national requirements, however, the counselor must show discretion when accepting or rejecting a Scout's task completion.
- Merit badge counselors are subject to the decisions of the troop committee or Scoutmaster when in doubt concerning a requirement.  
**False.** If a merit badge counselor has a question concerning his understandings of a merit badge requirement, he should contact the council advancement chairman. No unit has the authority to change or modify any requirement for any reason.
- If the unit advancement coordinator suspects that the counselor did not follow the guidelines and approved an application, the merit badge can be withheld.  
**False,** for the most part. If a registered merit badge counselor approves a merit badge, it must be awarded. There is no unit review process for merit badges. If a counselor is suspected of not following the guidelines, the council advancement chairman should be notified immediately. Merit badge counselors serve at the council level, even if they only work with Scouts from a single unit. If it is known that it is impossible that a Scout could possibly complete a requirement, but it was signed off, there is a process the unit leader can follow for recourse. See the Guide to Advancement 7.0.4.7 Limited Recourse for Unearned Merit Badges.

### More Merit Badge Counselor Information

1. An excellent website full of information is here: <http://grandcanyonbsa.org/meritbadgescounseling>
2. Merit badge counselor guide is available here: <https://filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-065.pdf>
3. Current merit badge requirements for all badges are here: <http://scouting.org/meritbadges>
4. Merit Badge Advancement Policies can be found in Chapter 7 of the [Guide to Advancement](#).
5. If you have any questions, please send an email to: [gccadvancement1@gmail.com](mailto:gccadvancement1@gmail.com)