

Grand Canyon Council

MERIT BADGE EVENT POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

Thank you for helping out with organizing a merit badge event! All leaders are concerned about the quality of the experience their Scouts will have when they attend a merit badge event and we know you are too. The goal of this guide and the merit badge program is personal growth and education, not just receiving a patch because the Scout attended or sat in a class.

The Council and district advancement committees have the responsibility of overseeing the offering of quality merit badge programs including group instructional events within their jurisdiction. This guide has been compiled to help you put on a high quality event that you can be proud of¹.

District advancement committees should provide oversight and guidance to units holding internal merit badge events and also provide guidance and oversight to units inviting individuals outside their units to unit events.

The following policies apply to ALL Scouting events conducted by the council, units and districts.

No council, committee, district, unit, or individual has the authority to add to, or subtract from, advancement requirements. There are limited exceptions relating only to youth members with special needs. For details see section 10 In the [Guide to Advancement](#), “Advancement for Members with Special Needs.”²

Individual districts, chartered organizations, and units, are not authorized or approved to rewrite or create their own advancement policies or requirements. For instance, you will not find any wording in the LDS Scouting Handbook, authorizing advancement policy changes. The annual [Boy Scout Requirements](#) publication and the [Guide to Advancement](#) document BSA advancement requirements, policies, and practices: which must be followed. Each Scout and registered adult agrees to follow BSA policies when they sign their application to join the Boy Scouts of America. With national standard policies and requirements that we all follow, the experience of a Scout should be similar where ever he participates in an advancement event.

Policies and Guidelines that must be met to assure a quality merit badge event:

- 1. Merit Badge Applications (Blue Cards):** Each Scout attending the merit badge event MUST have a Blue Card that has been signed by his Unit Leader or authorized designee. *See Guide to Advancement “7.0.0.2 About the Application for Merit Badge (“Blue Card”)” and “7.0.0.3 The Scout, the Blue Card, and the Unit Leader”*
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

¹ Guide to Advancement, section 3.0.0.1

² IBID, page 2

proceed with the initial session and ask him to get his unit leader's signature prior to the next meeting.

2. **Merit Badge Counselors Must Be Registered:** Anyone examining a Scout to pass him on a requirement for a merit badge must be registered with the BSA as a merit badge counselor. The common term for this is 'signing off' the requirement since the requirement is signed or initialed on the blue card. No one but a BSA registered merit badge counselor for that badge is authorized to pass a Scout on any requirement. This applies to events as well as individual counseling. Non-counselors may instruct a Scout on a requirement, or the Scout may learn on his own. However it is the merit badge counselor's responsibility to personally ensure that a Scout has individually accomplished what is detailed in the requirement.
3. **Individual Attention and Learning:** 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 compelling³.
4. **The biggest challenge to group instruction:** Is the monitoring of each individual Scout's progress. The larger the group, the more difficult it is to maintain a degree of personal attention to every participant. If the group becomes too large, then more counselors must be brought to bear, or other methods must be used to assure that every Scout actually and personally fulfills every requirement. If this challenge cannot be met, then group instruction must be abandoned. Awarding badges to Scouts on the basis of sitting in classrooms watching demonstrations or remaining silent during discussions is totally and completely unacceptable⁴.
5. **Completing the Requirements:** There must be attention to each individual Scout's projects and his fulfillment of *all* requirements. The Counselor must know that every Scout—actually and *personally*—completed the requirements as stated. If, for example, a requirement uses words like "show," "demonstrate," "explain" 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 discussions⁵.

Unless participants have completed many or most of the requirements ahead of time, it should be rare that Merit Badges can be completed during a one day event. Few if any merit badges lend themselves to such a fast pace. If the event is operated according to BSA policies and procedures, most Scouts will get a good start on the requirements with the ability to finish them later with another registered and approved counselor.

³ Guide to Advancement, Section 7.0.3.2 Group Instruction

⁴ From "The Essentials of Merit Badge Counseling"

⁵ Guide to Advancement, Section 7.0.3.2 Group Instruction

NOTE: Merit badges are not patterned to be like school work. Instead they are designed to be an individual achievement that is interactive, motivational and fun for the Scouts. It is unacceptable to award badges on the basis of sitting in a class setting and *watching* demonstrations, or remaining silent during discussions. Nor is it acceptable to consider that completed Merit Badge worksheets, constitute completion of the requirements⁶. The merit badge counselor must ensure that each Scout actually and personally completed requirements as written. For example, if the requirement states that the Scout discusses a subject with his merit badge counselor, it must be a meaningful two way discussion. A Scout raising his hand in a room full of other Scouts and making a one sentence response to a question is not a discussion, nor is sitting next to him and saying nothing. The merit badge counselor must assure that the requirements are met as stated by each Scout as an individual. No more is required, but also be reminded that no less is acceptable. Plan well for that may often mean either fewer Scouts in attendance, more time allotted for the session, or additional merit badge counselors than you originally thought.

6. **Qualifications of Counselors:** Qualified counselors are essential to Scout success. Persons serving as merit badge counselors must be registered with their BSA Council. Counselors must be men and women of good character, age 18 or older, and be recognized as having the skills and education in the subjects for which they are to serve as merit badge counselors. They should have the ability to work with Scout-age boys⁷.
7. **Youth Protection Training:** Use only Counselors whose Youth Protection Training is current and up to date. Counselors whose YPT date is older than two years will be dropped from the council approved list. *This is not open to negotiation or discussion.*
8. **Safety:** The health and safety of those working on merit badge requirements 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 tool⁸.
9. **Merit Badge Counselor Training:** All merit badge counselors are expected to be trained. They must understand the Boy Scouts of America’s aims, methods, and mission. It is also important they know how Scouts can grow as they learn through the merit badge process. Online training is available in the Boy Scout leader training section at the GSA Learn Center <http://my.scouting.org> .
10. **Class Size Limit:** Class size limit, or the ratio of Scouts to counselors, is fundamental to a Scout’s success. BSA Advancement Procedures include the following: "To the fullest extent possible, the merit badge counseling relationship is a Counselor-Scout arrangement in

⁶ IBID

⁷ See Guide to Advancement Section: “7.0.1.1 Qualifications of Counselors” and “Merit Badge Counselor Special Qualification Guidelines” under Resources & Forms on the Council web site.

⁸ It can be found online at “Scouting Safely,” <http://www.scouting.org/HealthandSafety/Sweet16>.

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 the 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 the requirements as they are written." 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 them⁹.

11. **Expectations:** Expectations should be established, and made known well before the date of the event, as to which requirements must be fulfilled ahead of time in order to actually finish merit badges at the event. Scouts should expect to have to participate to earn the badge at your event. Simply showing up will not earn them the badge. Merit badges are not like school, and passive attendance is rarely a requirement.
12. **Guest Experts or Guest Speakers:** Any guest experts or guest speakers, or others assisting who are not registered and approved as merit badge counselors, will 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.
13. **The Merit Badge Counselor's Job:** The Merit Badge Counselor must assure that each Scout actually and personally completed requirements as written; that each Scout meets all the requirements for the merit badge. To earn a merit badge, the Scout must complete the requirements of the merit badge exactly as stated. The counselor is not authorized to make any deletions, modifications or additions to requirements. The national goal is in establishing advancement standards that are fair and uniform for all Scouts. For example, if the requirement says that Scout must demonstrate an activity, then all Scouts in attendance must demonstrate the activity. One Scout showing the class how to accomplish it would not suffice.
14. **Merit Badge Worksheets:** Worksheets, such as the ones available at meritbadge.com, are a helpful tool, but are not official BSA materials. 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. Scouts shall not be required to use these learning aids in order to complete a merit badge. It can be suggested that they be used, but not required. Note that Scouts shall not be required to use these learning aids in order to complete a merit badge¹⁰.

⁹ Guide to Advancement section: 7.0.3.2 Group Instruction

¹⁰ Guide to Advancement, Section 7.0.4.8 Unofficial Worksheets and Learning Aids

15. **Merit Badge Pamphlets:** It's important that the Counselor and the Scout have and use the most current merit badge pamphlets. The content supports each of the requirements and is provided by experts in each subject. Many of the pamphlets also have an introductory "Note to the Counselor" that informs counselors of safety considerations as well as any training or special qualifications that might be needed for presenting merit badge activities. These notes represent part of the Boy Scouts of America's risk management plan, and counselors are expected to understand and work with them. Approximately one third of the merit badges and pamphlets are updated each year, so make sure you are working with the most current pamphlet.
16. **Approval Signatures:** Counselors agree to sign off only requirements where they are assured that the Scout has actually and personally completed. In a case where the counselor has not tested a Scout on a requirement and is not confident that the Scout has personally completed it, then the counselor should not sign the Scout off on the requirement.
17. **Merit Badges are Important Learning Experiences for Scouts:** The counselor introduces the Scout to subjects that may lead to a career choice or to a lifetime hobby.
18. **Buddy System:** BSA policy requires that an adult never meets with a Scout alone. BSA policy requires two registered 21 year old leaders at every meeting with Scouts. A parent may substitute for one of the 21 year old registered leaders.
19. **FUN:** The most effective merit badge events are fun: Scouts will be most likely to learn in a FUN and interactive environment.
20. **Preparation Is Essential:** Requirements that cannot reasonably be completed during the event should be required to be done as prerequisites. Event organizers should announce all prerequisite expectations at the time of registration. Scouts are encouraged to complete the prerequisites before attending the merit badge event. Registration timing/scheduling should permit Scouts the time necessary to complete the prerequisites and to read the merit badge pamphlet before the event. Walk-ins must receive a partial unless there is evidence of completed prerequisite work.
21. **Prerequisites:** 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 when the actual work done cannot be brought to the merit badge event. 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. If prerequisite work is not complete to the satisfaction of the counselor, the requirements must not be approved, resulting in a partial.

22. **Individual Attention to Each Scout:** Merit badges are designed to be an individual achievement. Attention must be given to each Scout's projects and his fulfillment of all requirements. The Counselor must know that the Scout he is working with—actually and personally—completed each requirement as stated before he/she signs off the requirement.
23. **Partially Complete Merit Badges:** If all merit badge requirements are not completed during the event, the counselor should provide clear documentation of which requirements were successfully completed, and which ones remain to be completed on the Merit Badge Application (the *blue card*.)
24. **Availability of Counselor after the Event:** Counselors should provide contact information, and offer a means of communication for follow-up, both by scouts and by adults or counselors who may later work with the scout in connection with the merit badge.
25. **Reporting Merit Badge Counseling Concerns:** There is a mechanism for unit leaders or others to report concerns to the 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 that BSA procedures were not followed¹¹.
26. **Fees:** 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, Merit Badge events must not be fundraisers.
27. **Best Practices:**
- a. Event organizers are encouraged to retain a list of attendees, including documentation showing which requirements were completed, specific to each Scout.
 - b. Units should be encouraged to provide adult leadership for Scouts attending from their unit.

Feedback: Please send questions and feedback on these policies and guidelines to:
GCCADVANCEMENT1@GMAIL.COM

¹¹ See the Guide to Advancement, "Reporting Merit Badge Counseling Concerns," 11.1.0.0.

CERTIFICATION OF COMPLIANCE

Each and every merit badge counselor at an event or camp needs to read these policies, agree to follow them and sign this form. The signed form needs to be handed into one of the following:

BSA Camp Director of BSA camp that is hosting the merit badge event
Grand Canyon Council Program Office
District Advancement Chairman of the district where the event is being held

I have read, understand and agree to abide by the Grand Canyon Council Merit Badge Events Policies and Guidelines.

Signed _____ Date: _____

Print Name: _____ MBC for: _____

Event Name: _____