Council and district advancement and recognition committees (generally referred to in this guide simply as council or district advancement committees) are responsible for implementing and facilitating advancement and processing most special awards and recognitions. This is done according to national procedures and local practices under the direction of the council executive board. Advancement committees operate under the Boy Scouts of America program function. They should cooperate with the other program function elements – outdoor programs, activities and civic service, and training – and also with the membership, finance, and unit-service functions. Accepting the responsibilities outlined in the current Guide to Advancement and in the following pages will help to accomplish this.
Revision History

- September 27, 2017 – Initial revision. Ratified at the Ventura County Council Board Meeting.
- May 1, 2019 – Updated text, topics, and sections to conform to the text, topics, and sections of the 2019 Guide to Advancement including the removal of Varsity Scouting references.
- May 1, 2019 – Topic 4.0.0.2 - Added endorsement of Scoutbook as preferred method of electronic advancement reporting.
- May 1, 2019 – Topic 5.0.1.1 – Added section on local council implementation for advancement at camp.
- May 1, 2019 – Topic 5.0.1.3 – Added section on letter of endorsement of summer camp staff merit badge counselors.
- May 1, 2019 – Topic 9.0.2.10 – Added local council policy for crowdfunding for Eagle Scout service projects.
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BSA Mission Statement
The mission of the Boy Scouts of America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Scout Law.

The Aims of Scouting
Every Scouting activity moves young people toward the basic aims of: character development, citizenship training, leadership, and mental and physical fitness.

Advancement is one of the eight methods used by Scout leaders to help youth fulfill the aims of the BSA.

Policy on Unauthorized Changes to Advancement Program
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, “Advancement for Members With Special Needs.”

Mandated Procedures and Recommended Practices
This publication clearly identifies mandated procedures with words such as “must” and “shall.” Where such language is used, no council, committee, district, unit, or individual has the authority to deviate from the procedures covered, without the written permission of the National Advancement Program Team.

Recommended best practices are offered using words like “should,” while other options and guidelines are indicated with terms such as “may” or “can.” Refer questions on these to your local district or council advancement chairs or staff advisors. They, in turn, may request interpretations and assistance from the National Advancement Program Team.

The Guide to Safe Scouting Applies
Policies and procedures outlined in the Guide to Safe Scouting apply to all BSA activities, including those related to advancement and Eagle Scout, Quartermaster, and Summit Award service projects.

What Does “Unit Leader” Mean?
Throughout this publication the term “unit leader” refers only to a Cubmaster, Scoutmaster, Venturing crew Advisor, Sea Scout Skipper, or Lone Scout friend and counselor. “Unit leadership” and “leader” are used as generic references to any registered adult leader in a unit and as such would include the unit leader.

What Does “Scouts BSA Handbook” Mean?
Throughout this publication, the term Scouts BSA Handbook refers to both the Scouts BSA Handbook for Boys and the Scouts BSA Handbook for Girls.

Advancement Defined
2.0.0.1 It Is a Method—Not an End in Itself
2.0.0.2 Advancement Is Based on Experiential Learning
2.0.0.3 Personal Growth Is the Primary Goal
4.0.0.2 - Reporting Advancement

"At the council’s discretion, the paper form, Advancement Report, No. 34403, may also be submitted."

"Council advancement committees may elect to accept a completed Eagle Scout Rank Application that is signed by the board of review chair and the Scout executive, in lieu of an advancement report form."

Local Policy & Implementation:
Action Item:
  • The Council Advancement Committee is to schedule regular education presentations on “Getting the Most from Internet Advancement” or its successor.
  • Emphasize the following to units:
    o "All badges of rank, merit badges, Eagle Palms, and Venturing awards are restricted items. Unit leadership may not purchase these insignia for presentation without having filed an advancement report with the local council. No unit inventory should be maintained under any circumstance.
  • Ventura County Council will accept the signed Eagle Scout Rank Application in lieu of a unit advancement report form, No. 34403.
  • Merit Badge Applications aka. “Blue Cards”, No. 34124, will remain as the primary reporting mechanism between merit badge counselors and units.
4.2.1.3 - The Scout is Reviewed

"The Eagle Scout board of review is held in accordance with National Council and local council procedures."

Local Policy & Implementation:

- Eagle Scout boards of review are conducted at the district level in accordance with National Council procedures.
- Letters of recommendation are to be sent to the Council Service Center to the attention of the District Eagle Scout Board of Review Chair.
- Letters of recommendation may be sent at any time after the Scout passes his Life Scout board of review. The Scout does not need to wait until submission of the Eagle Scout Rank Application.
4.2.3.3 - Service Projects

“Service projects required for ranks other than Eagle must be approved according to what is written in the requirements and may be conducted individually or through participation in patrol or troop efforts. They also may be approved for those assisting on Eagle Scout service projects. Service project work for ranks other than Eagle clearly calls for participation only. Planning, development, or leadership must not be required.”

“Time that Scouts spend assisting on Eagle service projects should be allowed in meeting these requirements. Note that Eagle projects do not have a minimum time requirement, but call for planning and development, and leadership of others, and must be preapproved by the council or district. (See "The Eagle Scout Service Project," 9.0.2.0.)”

Local Policy & Implementation:
- With the addition of service projects at *all* Boy Scout ranks starting January 1st, 2016 it is imperative that service project reporting be recorded at: https://servicehours.scouting.org
5.0.1.1 – Advancement in Camp Settings – Procedures Established by Council Advancement Committee

"Procedures for advancement in camp are established by the council advancement committee in compliance with national procedures, and under the direction of the council executive board. The camp director and program director, and the committee responsible for camp program, should be included in the process."

Local Policy & Implementation:
- The Ventura County Council Advancement Committee and Camping Committee shall annually review the Guide to Advancement and the National Camp Standards to determine any updates and changes regarding advancement at camp.
- The two committees will determine any recommended training for camp staff in the area of advancement and coordinate a schedule for providing training to include advancement committee members.
- The camp program director will submit the structure and method for instruction leading to advancement at camp for review by the council advancement committee. The council advancement committee will provide recommendations as required to ensure that national standards and local council policies are met.
- Upon completion of review, the council advancement committee will provide three (3) copies of Letters of Endorsement for filing and any other required purpose.
5.0.1.3 Advancement Committee Approves Merit Badge Counselors

Resident camp standards require a letter from the council advancement committee approving merit badge counselors.

Local Policy & Implementation:
- As part of the letter of endorsement stated in Topic 5.0.1.1, the letter shall include the statement that all qualified camp staff members are included in the council’s merit badge counselor list.
5.0.8.0 - Using Technology-Based Tools in Advancement

"Procedures for using Web-based tools in advancement are established by the council advancement committee in compliance with national procedures. Below are examples of actions that might be considered."

Local Policy & Implementation:

- The Ventura County Council will endorse and actively support the use of Scoutbook as the primary method of technology-based tools. Education opportunities will be facilitated for its use on a periodic basis.
- Non-Scoutbook electronic tools may have local subject-matter experts but will not be officially supported by the council.
Section 6 – Electronic Advancement Reporting

Local Policy & Implementation:

- The Ventura County Council will endorse and actively support the use of Scoutbook as the primary method of technology-based tools. Education opportunities will be facilitated for its use on a periodic basis.
- Non-Scoutbook electronic tools may have local subject-matter experts but will not be officially supported by the council.
7.0.0.3 - The Scout, the Blue Card, and the Unit Leader

"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."

Local Policy & Implementation:
- Merit Badge Applications aka. “Blue Cards”, No. 34124, will remain as the primary reporting mechanism between merit badge counselors and units.
- Ventura County Council’s summer camp uses a reporting system that is in compliance with the National Design and Development Department for Scouts who have worked toward or have earned merit badges at camp.
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."

"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."

Local Policy & Implementation:
• There shall only be council-level counselors. No unit-only registration.
• Effective October 1, 2017, all new/renewed merit badge counselors shall be fully trained before their applications/renewals will be accepted.
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."

Local Policy & Implementation:
- Counselors will be limited to not more than six (6) Eagle Scout required merit badges.
- There is no limit to the number of non-Eagle Scout required merit badges so long as the counselor has been determined to be qualified to counsel the merit badge through certification where required by the Guide to Advancement and/or subject matter knowledge.
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, 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."

Local Policy & Implementation:

- “Fully trained” shall mean to be current Youth Protection Training (training code Y01) and either:
  - Completion of the classroom training “Essentials of Merit Badge Counseling” (training code “D76), or
  - Completion of on-line or face-to-face training through the BSA Learning Center at: http://my.scouting.org resulting in the following training codes:
    - SCO_431 – Aims and Methods of Scouts BSA
    - SCO_433 – Ideals and Beliefs of Scouts BSA
    - SCO_448 – Merit Badge Counseling for Scouts BSA
    - SCO_435 – Intro to Merit Badges for Scouts BSA
    - SCO_434 - Merit Badge Counselors Sign Up
    - SCO_430 – Advancement for Scouts BSA
- In addition to the on-line training, classroom training shall be provided within each district on a regular basis and available council-wide dependent on availability of materials from the National Council. The schedule shall be published within the advancement section of the Ventura County Council web site.
- Merit badge counselors who are not fully trained by June 30, 2019 shall be dropped from the merit badge council roster.
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."

Local Policy & Implementation:

- Any and all fairs, midways, camps, or other venues other than traditional sessions between counselor and Scout shall be reviewed and approved by the Ventura County Council Advancement Committee before the venue takes place to ensure that it is in compliance with the Guide to Advancement and other relevant BSA publication (e.g. National Camp Standard).
- Any fees associated with the event are to be approved in advance by the Ventura County Council following council policies and accounting procedures.
9.0.1.4 Obtain Required Signatures

“The unit leader and committee chair signatures represent approval for the candidate to move on to a board of review. In providing them, the signers carefully check the application. It may be helpful to compare the application to the Scout’s current advancement profile obtained through the BSA system or to a printout obtained from the local council service center. If there are “red-flag” issues (see 9.0.1.3), such as time spans between ranks that don’t meet the requirements, then the dates should be confirmed. If they are correct but do not fit the requirement, then the Scout, parent or guardian, or unit leader should contact the district advancement chair for guidance. Usually, as with unavoidable discrepancies, a letter of explanation will be helpful in addressing the issue. Note there is no requirement that the signatures of the Scout, unit leader, and committee chair must be dated before the Scout’s 18th birthday.

If either of the approvals from the unit leader or the committee chair is withheld, a board of review must still be granted if requested by the Scout. For details, see “Initiating Eagle Scout Board of Review Under Disputed Circumstances,” 8.0.3.2.”

Local Policy & Implementation:

- The role of the Chartered Organization Representative does not include signing Eagle Scout Rank Applications as an alternate to the unit leader or committee chair despite their required signature on the adult leader application. If the unit leader or committee chair is not available to sign the Eagle Scout rank application, their assigned designee (e.g. assistance unit leader or unit advancement coordinator) may sign in their place. It is incumbent on the unit to designate alternates in advance of unforeseen circumstances. As is stated above, in the event of unforeseen circumstances, a letter of explanation will be helpful in addressing the issue. The topic, as it stands, provides ample guidance for local implementation and no local exceptions need to be implemented.
9.0.1.7 References Contacted

“Council advancement committee members—or others designated—have the responsibility to secure recommendations from the references appearing under requirement 2 on the Eagle Scout Rank Application. This may be done by letter, form, or phone call. For reasons of privacy and confidentiality, electronic submissions are discouraged. It is acceptable to send or deliver to the references an addressed envelope with instructions, and perhaps a form to complete. The Scout may assist with this, but that is the limit of his participation. He is not to be responsible for follow-through or any other aspect of the process.”

“It is up to the council’s designated representatives to collect the responses. If after a reasonably diligent effort no response can be obtained from any references, the board of review must go on without them. It must not be postponed or denied for this reason, and the Scout shall not be asked to submit additional references or to provide replacements.”

“Completed reference responses of any kind are the property of the council and are confidential, and only review-board members and those officials with a specific need may see them. The responses are not to be viewed by or returned to the Scout. Doing so could discourage the submission of negative information. For the same reason, those providing references do not have the option of giving the reference directly to the Scout and shall not be given the option of waiving confidentiality. Once a review has been held, or an appeal process conducted, responses shall be returned to the council, where they will be destroyed after the Eagle Scout credentials are released or the appeal is concluded.”

“In Boy Scouting, advancement references are required only for Eagle Scout rank. The council determines methods of contact.”

Local Policy & Implementation:

- The Ventura County Council’s method of contact shall be as follows:
  - The Scout shall contact potential references to determine if they would write a letter of reference on his behalf.
  - The council shall provide a form letter and envelope template on its web site to help the Scout contact potential references.
  - The Scout shall list those who agreed to provide references with contact information on his Eagle Scout Rank Application. Note: This action may be done any time after the Scout has passed his Life board of review. He does not need to wait until just before submitting his application to the council.
  - No other action is expected of the Scout.

- Letters of recommendation are to be sent to the Council Service Center to the attention of the District Eagle Scout Board of Review Chair/Coordinator.

- Letters of recommendation may be solicited and sent any time after the Scout passes his Life Scout board of review. He does not need to wait until he is ready to submit his Eagle Scout Rank Application to the council.
9.0.2.10 - Eagle Scout Service Project Fundraising Issues

"The Eagle Scout Service Project Fundraising Application, found in the Eagle Scout Service Project Workbook, is used to obtain approval when required. Note that local councils may add further definition to the standards established here or on the application form. For example, they could state that fundraisers such as bake sales and car washes do not require a fundraising application and are, in essence, preapproved. They could also establish dollar thresholds; for example, “Any effort expected to raise less than $500 does not require an application.” Completed forms are sent to the local council service center where they are routed to those responsible for approval. This may be a district executive or another staff member, the council or district advancement committee, a finance committee, etc., as determined appropriate by the local council."

Local Policy & Implementation:

- Regardless of the amount, any project that involves, or may involve, fund raising must have the Eagle Scout Service Project Fundraising Application completed and approved at the district level at the time of the project proposal.

- After careful review and consideration of the spirit and intent of the Eagle Scout service project and raising funds; in order to fulfill the goals of the Aims and Methods of Scouts BSA, the committee determined that crowdfunding tends to minimize the experiential learning and character building of a personal approach for donations. As a result, any fund-raising application that includes crowdfunding will be rejected by the council.