



March 19, 2021

This letter is to define the procedures for merit badge counselors, and rank advancement at the Edmund D. Strang Scout Reservation (Camp Strang) for the 2021 Summer Camp season. The council advancement committee in cooperation, and working with the camping committee chairman, and the Camp Director have approved the following procedures for Summer Camp.

Using the Guide to Advancement, 2019 Edition

The Camp Director will organize their program staff, merit badge counselors, and area directors in such a way that the program in camp is completely operative for the season. Camp merit badge counselors must be qualified camp staff members who are qualified in the subjects and are at least 18 years old. Each counselor should have the most updated merit badge books for every merit badge they teach. Using the book, they need to put together their syllabus for each merit badge, remember to account for time needed per requirement, and must include the four processes of advancement -- learning, testing, reviewing, and recognition. Younger staff members who are knowledgeable in the subject may assist the merit badge counselors with instruction and should be under the supervision of the counselor. The merit badge counselors, program director, and camp director are the only staff members authorized to sign blue cards. Each counselor must maintain the exact standards as outlined in the merit badge requirements -- ***nothing deleted, nothing added*** -- and make himself or herself available at the time most convenient to the Scouts.

Partial completion of merit badges should be credited to a Scout on the blue card and given to the Scoutmaster or troop advancement chair at the end of the week. There is no time limit for completion of merit badges other than age 18 requirement. Merit badges can be taught in large groups or with an individual using the 2-deep method of leadership (no 1 on 1). However, regardless of the class format, each Scout must be reviewed individually by the counselor to ensure completion of the badge's requirements.

The following merit badges have special qualifications or certifications for the merit badge counselors: *Archery, Canoeing, Climbing, Kayaking, Lifesaving, Rifle Shooting, Rowing, Shotgun Shooting, and Swimming*. Staff members and counselors who are teaching these merit badges should consult the merit badge pamphlets for details and to maintain awareness of changes and updates as pamphlets are revised. The special qualifications and certifications are attached to this letter. ***All certifications must be current.***

Summer Camp merit badge counselors are approved to sign merit badges only for the period during Summer Camp with the approval of the Camp Director. This is only for the scouts attending Summer Camp, and camp staff members who complete the requirements. Any visiting scouts coming up to camp for merit badge work, or signatures to their Blue Cards must check in with the Camp Director. The counselor must have the Council Advancement Committee's approval to work with scouts not attending camp. If summer camp counselors want to be



counselors year-round, they must complete a merit badge counselor form and be approved by the Council Advancement Committee, and re-register yearly.

Please provide the advancement committee and Chair of Advancement with a list of all merit badge counselors, and the merit badges that they plan on teaching at summer camp. There are 60 merit badges offered this year per the 2021 brochure. Please provide the plan of coverage for each merit badge offered.

**Authorized Merit Badges for the 2021 Summer Camp Season - *Eagle Required* are in bold.**

**Scheduled Merit Badges (51)** – Animation, Archery, Automotive Maintenance, Basketry, ***Camping***, Canoeing, Chess, Climbing, ***Cooking***, Digital Technology, Drafting, Electronics, ***Emergency Preparedness***, ***Environmental Science***, Farm Mechanics, Fingerprinting, ***First Aid***, Fish and Wildlife Management, Fishing, Forestry, Geocaching, Geology, Graphic Arts, ***Hiking***, Kayaking, Lifesaving, Mammal Study, Moviemaking, Nature, Orienteering, ***Personal Fitness***, Pioneering, Programming, Pulp & Paper, Radio, Robotics, Reptile and Amphibians, Rifle Shooting, Rowing, Shotgun Shooting, Sign Signals and Codes, Small Boat Sailing, Space Exploration, ***Swimming***, Weather, Welding, Wilderness Survival, Woodcarving

**By Appointment Only (3)** – Astronomy, Photography, Soil and Water Conservation

**Merit Badges Offered During Eagle Week (6)** – ***Citizenship in the Community, Citizenship in the Nation, Citizenship in the World, Communications, Family Life, Personal Management***

Rank advancement at summer camp should be encouraged: if a troop does not have enough people for Scoutmaster Conferences, or Boards of Review, camp staff members should be prepared and available to assist. At the Brownsea Island Program the advisor must keep good and complete records to assist unit leaders with rank advancement for Tenderfoot, Second Class and First Class. All rank advancement needs to be shared with the home troop so that it can be properly processed.

The advancement committee will periodically visit camp to assure compliance. Attached to this letter are excerpts from the **Guide to Advancement, 2019 Edition** that pertain to summer camp. If there are any advancement questions or concerns, please contact the Council Office or me, Terry Osenbach, Council Advancement Chair.

*Approved by Housatonic Council Advancement Committee on MM/DD/2021*

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Terry Osenbach", with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Terry Osenbach  
Council Advancement Chair  
Housatonic Council

## **From the Guide to Advancement - Special Considerations pg. 35**

### **5.0.1.0 Advancement in Camp Settings**

#### **5.0.1.1 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. Their expertise will be important in evaluating practicality, and their buy-in can improve cooperation from the camp staff.

Once procedures are in place, advancement committee representatives should periodically visit each resident camp to assist in efforts to achieve compliance. The visits can also surface new ideas on improving implementation and building a worthwhile partnership. The desired result of the partnership is a quality merit badge program operated according to the policies, procedures, and best practices outline in section 7, “The Merit Badge Program,” and especially in topic 7.0.3.2, “Group Instruction.” Camps should not have a reputation of “Just show up and get the badge.”

#### **5.0.1.2 Procedural Examples**

Below are examples of procedures a council advancement committee might consider for camp settings.

1. How to handle staff training on the particulars of advancement in each program—Cub Scouting, Scouts BSA, Venturing, and Sea Scouts—as appropriate. This training could be conducted or supervised by members of the council advancement committee.
2. Which merit badges may be offered at camp. Note that summer camp is not the best place for some merit badges, such as the citizenship merit badges, which can be earned at home under the direction of merit badge counselors who may be more qualified than those available at camp.
3. Recommendations on reasonable instructor-to-Scout ratios for classes or activities related to advancement.
4. A process by which the council advancement committee will approve camp merit badge counselors. Note that camp leaders should recognize that it may be unlikely for members of the camp staff to have the expertise or maturity to instruct a wide range of merit badge subjects.
5. How to handle the training of merit badge counselors and camp staff to help ensure Scouts meet requirements as written—no more, no less.
6. How to develop lesson plans and guidelines for the instruction of merit badges and other advancement opportunities that make the best use of the time available and assure campers get credit only for requirements they actually and personally fulfill.
7. A process for accepting work completed before camp begins, and for issuing partials for merit badges that take more time to complete than is available at camp.
8. Communication plans to build awareness of camp practices, such as those related to scheduling, prerequisites, Scoutmaster approvals, paperwork, etc.
9. Procedures for approving completion of requirements for Scout, Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class ranks. It is appropriate for camps to offer “Trail to First Class” programs, and camp staff members

are permitted to sign off related requirements; however, they should offer unit leaders the opportunity to do so.

10. Record-keeping practices that facilitate accurate reporting to unit leadership of completed requirements and partial merit badges and provide documentation if units need it later.
11. Collecting and making use of feedback on camp advancement program quality.

### **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. There are no camp-related exemptions from the qualifications described under “Qualifications of Counselors,” 7.0.1.1. Councils are not permitted to change the rules about who qualifies. Staff members under 18 are not to serve as, or be treated as, merit badge counselors; however, those with subject-matter knowledge may assist qualified and approved counselors with instruction. Classes and activities may take place in group settings, but this must be done in accordance with the procedures described in “Group Instruction,” 7.0.3.2, assuring that only Scouts who actually and personally fulfill requirements receive credit. No council, committee, district, unit, or individual has the authority to add to or subtract from advancement requirements.

### **5.0.1.4 Statement on Unauthorized Changes to Advancement in Camp Programs**

Though stated earlier in this publication, it bears repeating here: No council, committee, district, unit, or individual has the authority to add to or subtract from advancement requirements. There are no camp-related exemptions except those described in “Advancement for Members With Special Needs,” 10.0.0.0.

Camp counselors and those assisting them, regardless the circumstances, are not permitted to modify requirements. If requirements as written cannot be completed at camp, they must be done elsewhere, before or after the camp experience. The Application for Merit Badge “blue card” (see “About the Application for Merit Badge (“Blue Card”), 7.0.0.2) has space to record and initial what is finished, and age 18 is the only limit to finishing partials. If unit leadership or others dissatisfied with the quality of advancement instruction at camp become concerned Scouts are being approved for merit badges they have not earned, a report should be filed with the council advancement committee. The form found in the appendix (see “Reporting Merit Badge Counseling Concerns,” 11.1.0.0) may be used for this purpose. See also “Once It Is Earned, It’s Earned,” 7.0.4.6, and “Limited Recourse for Unearned Merit Badges,” 7.0.4.7.

### **5.0.1.5 Advancement Committee as a Partner in Camp-Related Advancement**

Council advancement committees that partner with camp staffs and approach solutions jointly are more likely to see strong programs. Implementing a merit badge program at camp is not a simple task. It is not something to consider from afar and then make rules about. Committees with members who make the trip and lend a hand are more likely to see successful results. An example might be helping the staff meet the camp standards requiring training in several areas around advancement.

### **7.0.0.1 The Benefits of Merit Badges – Guide to Advancement pg. 42**

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 Scout may begin working on a merit badge at any time after registering in Scouts BSA or becoming a qualified Venturer or Sea Scout. 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 Scout in Scouts BSA or as a qualified Venturer or Sea 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 and approved counselor signs that all requirements have been met, the Scout and the unit leader should meet to discuss the Scout’s experience. The unit leader then signs the Applicant’s Record portion and returns it to the Scout, who should retain it permanently.

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 Program Team. 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, guardians, and leaders, and counsel them on proper methods as the need arises.

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

A few merit badges have certain restrictions, but otherwise any registered Scout, or qualified Venturer or Sea Scout, may work on any of them at any time. Before beginning to work with a merit badge counselor, however, the Scout is to have a discussion with the unit leader. That a discussion has been held is indicated by the unit leader’s signature on the Application for Merit Badge, 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 already have one in mind with whom he or she 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 or her 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.

A Scout who wants to change counselors 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 Scout’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 may be encountered along the way and perhaps give 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.

***For Additional Guidance please refer to the Guide to Advancement, 2019 Edition***