

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 muzzleloaders 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