



Building Effective Advancement Committees

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this resource is to provide guidance about creating effective council and district advancement committees. It describes various areas of responsibility that advancement chairs might choose to delegate to committee members and provides suggestions on where and how to find and recruit volunteers.

ORGANIZING AN EFFECTIVE ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE

To accomplish the suggested responsibilities outlined in *Guide to Advancement*, No. 33088, topics 3.0.0.1 and 3.0.0.2, council and district advancement committees should be well staffed and organized. Dividing the functions of the advancement committee into areas of responsibility might help crystallize the roles and help with the recruitment and retention of committee members. Spreading the work among more people will make for less work for any individual. Even if a committee has not succeeded at recruiting individuals for each function, volunteers wearing multiple hats generally appreciate clearly understanding their responsibilities.

The following list of 12 areas of responsibility is provided as guidance about functions of advancement committees that can be divided among various members of the committee. Councils and districts should tailor their committees based on their circumstances and needs. Typically, larger advancement committees will be more effective. The following are suggestions for allocating areas of responsibility:

1. District/unit advancement chairs support
2. Volunteerism
3. Advancement promotion
4. Advancement training and events
5. Camping committee and outdoor programs liaison
6. Records/Journey to Excellence
7. Technological reporting support
8. Merit badge counselor and Supernova mentor coordination
9. Eagle, Summit, and Quartermaster award issues
10. Special needs Scouting
11. Awards and recognition
12. Religious emblems

Each area of responsibility is described in more detail in the following paragraphs. Although each area is described as a position, the duties can be delegated in the manner deemed best under the circumstances of each council and district.

District/Unit Advancement Chairs Support

On the council advancement committee, the district advancement chair support function is designed to support the district advancement chairs and inspire a positive relationship between council and district advancement committees. Most importantly, a volunteer dedicated to these duties affords the council advancement chair more time to build committee membership and organize efforts across all Scouting programs. Even in councils where the council committee is composed of district advancement chairs, attention should be given to ensuring that the council is supporting the district advancement chairs at the same time as they serve the council.

Specific tasks might include regular contact with the district advancement chairs, ensuring that each district advancement committee has adequate membership and is able to provide updated advancement information and specific support as the district requests it. This member may also coordinate with the district chairs to meet district and council Journey to Excellence goals and encourage 100 percent reporting on the internet portal for advancement reporting (i.e., Internet Advancement or Scoutbook).

District advancement committees may benefit from filling a similar role to coordinate with the unit advancement chairs. The primary function is to support unit advancement coordinators and inspire a positive relationship between the units and district. Specific tasks might include regular contact with the unit advancement coordinators to ensure they have up-to-date information and any needed support. The member performing this function could also encourage reporting by the units on the internet portal for advancement reporting and for Journey to Excellence.

Volunteerism

The volunteerism function addresses a goal identified in topic 3.0.0.1 of the *Guide to Advancement* for both the council and district advancement committees to have members who “represent a breadth of experience in all Scouting programs.”

Many district advancement committees easily recruit volunteers to support Eagle Scout needs. The volunteerism function can help district advancement committees reach beyond Eagle rank issues to support Cub Scouting, Scouts BSA, and Sea Scouting advancement, as well as Venturing awards with committee members from all programs. This helps the advancement committees at the council and district levels provide ongoing training to maintain awareness of updated procedures, best practices, and related details.

Advancement Promotion

The person focusing on this function helps drive awareness of advancement to encourage success and retention in Scouting. For Cub Scouting, this function might include promoting programs to ensure all den members are advancing annually through well-planned programs. At the Scouts BSA level, promoting successful initiatives, such as “First Class in 12 to 18 months,” helps provide quality advancement experiences early in the program to help improve retention. This member may also coordinate media placements featuring Eagle Scout, Venturing Summit, or Sea Scout Quartermaster award earners to increase community awareness of Scouting’s positive impact.

Promotion of advancement should also join in the effort to encourage packs and troops to use the internet portal for advancement reporting to improve reporting of the rate of advancement and service hours.

Advancement Training and Events

The council advancement committee member responsible for advancement training ensures active training of advancement administrators and other adult leaders at all levels of Scouting, ranging from district advancement committee members to unit-level advancement coordinators. Basic training may also include unit leaders and committee chairs. In addition to basic training needs, this function ensures that advancement volunteers are current with all Boy Scouts of America program updates. This member is well versed in the use of the *Guide to Advancement* and best practices to build quality programs at the unit level as well as in support materials found on the Advancement Resources webpage (see www.scouting.org/advancement). Ongoing training can address specific needs (e.g., increasing use of the internet portal for advancement reporting or encouraging best practices for Eagle project coaching).

Camping Committee and Outdoor Programs Liaison

This member of the council advancement committee works with the council’s camping and outdoors committee to ensure that the Cub Scouting, Scouts BSA, Venturing, and Sea Scouting outdoor programs are rich in advancement opportunities and that they comply with national camp and advancement standards as found in the *National Camp Accreditation Program: National Camp Standards*, No. 430-056, and the *Guide to Advancement*. Cub Scout resident and day camps should have robust and diverse choices for all ranks. Scouts BSA camps should offer well-planned activities for Scouts working on the trail to First Class as well as for those whose major focus is on merit badges. Camping and outdoor activities for Venturers should help introduce them

to Venturing recognition through activities that include the awards requirements. For Sea Scouts, outdoor activities should include frequent opportunities for them to complete rank advancement requirements.

This advancement committee member should also work in partnership with the camp director and program director to assist in the efforts to help provide a properly trained camp staff and merit badge counselor corps. Other responsibilities might range from recommending various camp facilities that may support unit advancement interests to promoting advancement opportunities at high-adventure camps.

Records/Journey to Excellence

Fulfilling this function requires working with the council staff to track and analyze advancement progress across all districts and Scouting programs, and their contributions toward achieving Journey to Excellence objectives. Resources, training, and other efforts can then be properly administered for maximum results. District advancement committees should work with the council committee and focus on this function for their districts and units.

Another critical responsibility is to promote advancement reporting by all units, especially through the use of technology. Reporting through the internet portal for advancement is critical for securing accurate data for analysis. In addition to Journey to Excellence, detailed record keeping and reporting can identify specific program improvements to enhance the advancement experience for all youth members. This may range from identifying successful programs based on outcomes and using them in promoting best practices to evaluating potential advancement pitfalls and finding solutions.

Technological Reporting Support

The internet portal for advancement reporting (i.e., Internet Advancement or Scoutbook) is a key tool for units, districts, and councils. It provides a central source for individual advancement records for the unit, valuable information for commissioners to use in evaluating program health and unit needs, and a database for statistical analysis at the local and national levels. Using it also assures that advancement recorded will count toward the Journey to Excellence.

Besides promoting the use of the internet portal for advancement reporting, the person performing this function ensures all units can access the portal, use it efficiently, and record youth achievement in a timely manner. Providing Scoutbook support to units is another important function for this area of responsibility. This person also provides training materials or presentations and assists the advancement committee records keeper with statistical information.

Merit Badge Counselor and Supernova Mentor Coordination

Council advancement committees are expected to keep up-to-date lists of merit badge counselors. In many councils, district advancement committees play a significant role. With the advent of the STEM Nova Awards program, councils and districts are also called upon to keep lists of Supernova mentors. First and foremost, the advancement committee ensures that enough merit badge counselors and, depending on the organization of each council, Supernova mentors are recruited, that they properly register annually with the BSA, and that their Youth Protection training is current. In performing this function, the committee also sees that units are using the services of registered and approved merit badge counselors as described in topic 7.0.1.1 of the *Guide to Advancement*. The committee chair or coordinator of this function assists with the approval of merit badge counselors and Supernova mentors according to local council practices and should do the following:

- provide training for merit badge counselors, Supernova mentors, and Nova counselors
- distribute copies of *A Guide for Merit Badge Counseling*, No. 512-065, to those who need them
- advise counselors and mentors on changes to applicable BSA policies and procedures
- remind counselors and mentors to consult the *Guide to Safe Scouting*, No. 34416, as it applies to their work

Finally, the person taking the lead on this function may serve as a key contact when questions arise from unit leaders about related procedures and concerns.

Eagle, Summit, and Quartermaster Award Issues

The Eagle Scout rank is often the major focal point for advancement committees because of the specific procedures used in approving it. This area of responsibility includes helping to ensure that both national and local council procedures are properly followed, including, but not limited to, approving Eagle Scout service project proposals, ensuring availability of project coaches, securing references, handling board of review arrangements, and addressing the paperwork necessary to document each Scout's achievement. Because of the nature of the tasks, these activities can be easily divided and should be split among interested volunteers.

Council committees should work with the district advancement chairs or representatives to ensure these functions are supported. This support would commonly involve training and regular communications. It might

also involve council action on extension requests or other Eagle-related matters as stated in the *Guide to Advancement*. Units must receive accurate information and advice to ensure compliance with established procedures. The person coordinating this function might also be a key contact in the event of boards of review under disputed circumstances and appeals, which makes having a comprehensive knowledge of the policies and guidelines governing advancement critical.

This area of responsibility also includes providing similar guidance, approvals, and coordination for the Sea Scouts Quartermaster rank and for the Venturing Summit Award.

Special Needs Scouting

The BSA has a long history of successful advancement for individuals with special needs. To support these Scouts, it is recommended that advancement committees leverage the expertise of someone closely acquainted with BSA advancement policies and procedures regarding Scouts with special needs. This subject is addressed in detail in Section 10 of the *Guide to Advancement*. This section includes information on registering qualified individuals beyond the age of eligibility and procedures for applying for alternative rank requirements up through First Class or alternative merit badges for Eagle Scout rank. The committee also supports training for district and unit leaders regarding compliance and handling of special needs requests. The committee should also endeavor to provide support for units serving Scouts with special needs.

Awards and Recognition

Advancement committees promote and present non-advancement recognitions in accordance with the local council policies and procedures, including those related to training, leadership, outdoors, conservation, and others. Examples include the William T. Hornaday Awards, National Outdoor Awards program recognitions, interpreter recognitions, and a variety of special interest and program-driven awards, such as the BSA's STEM Nova Awards program, emergency preparedness initiative, and lifesaving and meritorious action awards. The key to success is educating districts and units about these recognitions and awards and the requirements to encourage individuals to earn them or to nominate others. Some council and district advancement committees are also responsible for the selection or presentation of the Silver Beaver Award, District Award of Merit, and other adult service recognitions.

Religious Emblems

The religious emblems function tracks and encourages youth and adults to earn religious emblems at all levels of the BSA program. This function includes educating and motivating districts and units to recruit volunteers to lead this area of responsibility and to ensure program information is readily available to both chartered organizations and BSA members. Council advancement committees are encouraged to work with the council's religious relationships committees to coordinate events, such as religious retreats, which may increase interest.

FINDING AND RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS FOR ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEES

The task of assembling a committee of 12 or more members may seem daunting. However, finding volunteers does not have to be difficult. With prospecting methods such as “Friendstorming on Tour,” it is possible to search out and recruit enough volunteers to fill this committee.

For advancement committees to positively influence the rate and processes of advancement in Cub Scouting, Scouts BSA, Venturing, and Sea Scouting, most council and district advancement committees will need an adequate number of volunteers. Increasing the size and function of these committees will reap benefits for committee volunteers as well as youth and adult members in Scouting.

The first question is, “Where do you look?” The following is a list of potential sources of volunteers.

1. Pack and troop advancement coordinators—and assistant unit leaders who understand how to support their Scouts in a strong advancement program—are among the best prospects for advancement committee members.
2. Units with high rates of advancement probably have leaders with experience who can help. Monthly advancement reports from the council advancement committee or office staff provide a great starting point. When districts rank their packs and troops by advancement earned per Scout, they might not only identify where to find “best practices” ideas but also outstanding unit volunteers who facilitate advancement effectively and who might also be a good fit for an advancement committee.
3. Units with above-average programs filled with high-adventure treks, a prominent level of participation at council events, etc., may be a source of quality advancement committee prospects. Units with great programs probably have great advancement programs too. District commissioners, district camping chairs, or district committee chairs can help to identify these units.
4. Savvy roundtable commissioners and unit commissioners can always have an eye out and an ear tuned for undiscovered adults who exhibit a talent for or interest in the advancement process and mission.
5. Veteran Eagle Scouts; merit badge counselors, Supernova mentors, and Nova counselors who express an interest in doing more; and former or older summer camp staff members are good prospects.

6. Look for retiring Cubmasters, Scoutmasters, unit committee chairs, and unit advancement coordinators. They have seen the benefits of advancement and understand the process from a unit perspective.
7. Check training attendance lists and rosters. People who attend trainings are not only trained in the program, but they have also demonstrated an interest in great Scouting and may be ready for district or council involvement. If they remain active in their units, their contribution can be scaled according to what they can handle. Additionally, they offer the advantage of the perspectives from their current positions.
8. Approach volunteers at Cub Scout day camp, camporees, council and district recognition functions, and other council and district events. All these individuals have a demonstrated interest in the Scouting program. Setting up follow-up meetings might prove to allow for better conversations and recruitment.
9. Use the BSA alumni or National Eagle Scout Association registry to identify potential prospects.
10. Don’t forget the parents. Many just need to be asked to help.

Once you have identified one or more prospects to approach, recruit with an individualized touch. Speak with them in person or, if necessary, via a personal phone call. For busy people, it might be easy to say “no” to an email but not as easy in person. Recruitment is likely to be more successful if you are specific about the role and function you would like the prospect to undertake. Be prepared with specifics about what you want them to do. Don’t forget to provide thoughts on why you think they are suited for the proposed tasks.

Consider inviting volunteers to help with one event or activity. Start them out slowly. That activity may be an Eagle board of review or assistance with a section at an advancement training session. Once they have been successful and given recognition and positive feedback, approach them soon with the next opportunity.

Constant attention to cultivating new members will help your committee thrive, grow, and succeed.

Available for use by councils and districts is the “Developing Council and District Advancement Committees” advancement educational presentation. The link to this presentation is available at www.scouting.org/advancement from the Advancement Educational Presentations link located under the General Resources category.

