Welcome to the First Issue of Counselor’s Compass!

The Boy Scouts of America’s Merit Badge Maintenance Task Force, a group of dedicated volunteers like you, is pleased to share the first issue of Counselor’s Compass with you. Our goal is to inform, guide, and inspire merit badge counselors so that your investment in Scouting is worthwhile. Each quarter, we will cover essential topics and tips such as advancement program updates, effective counseling techniques, and helpful resources. We will also showcase council best practices.

The task force was officially established March 3, 2011, to help update merit badges to ensure program content remains relevant for today’s youth. As the review process began, Scouters realized more support for counselors was needed. As a result, an entire merit badge section was added in the Guide to Advancement, and the educational presentation The Essentials of Merit Badge Counseling was developed. Both resources are available at www.scouting.org/advancement.aspx.

Thank you for all you do to improve youth experiences and skills. Whether you teach a required badge Scouts need to earn the Eagle Scout rank or an optional one related to a trade or hobby, your investment of time, talent, and subject matter expertise is appreciated!

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Things to Do

Make The Essentials of Merit Badge Counseling Your e-Learning Tool

Learning effective counseling techniques is part of the advancement educational presentation The Essentials of Merit Badge Counseling, accessible at: www.scouting.org/filestore/training/advancement/merit_badge_counselor/the_essentials.ppt.

This self-paced resource introduces counselors to the merit badge process, helps them gain an understanding of their unique role in advancement, and provides them with good instructional techniques for working with Scouts. Veteran Scouters may discover a new teaching approach for capturing Scouts’ attention. Topics covered in the presentation include:

- Scouting’s mission, aims, and methods
- Program benefits
- The counseling process
- Importance of fulfilling requirements as written
- Group instruction and camp settings
- Question and answer session

Attending instructor-led trainings may be the norm in the community where you live, so check with your local Scout service center for details.

Steps for Success

Counseling Tips

Whether teaching a merit badge for the first time, or celebrating years of counseling experience, there’s always room for improvement. Begin by asking a few simple questions:

1. Are you using the latest pamphlet and requirements for badge instruction?
2. Do you have the skills, education, and experience to teach the subject matter of the merit badge to youth? And, if required as for certain badges, do you have the specialty certification or training needed to teach the badge?
3. Is your required Youth Protection training current?

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Counselors will discover using the latest pamphlet is a great way to become familiar with both requirements and content. The pamphlets are updated regularly, so check with your Scout shop or go on-line at [www.scoutstuff.org/](http://www.scoutstuff.org/) to acquire the latest edition.

Using the latest requirements to mentor Scouts is important. Topic 7.0.4.3 in the *Guide to Advancement* states once new or revised requirements appear in the *Boy Scout Requirements* book, released each January, any Scout just beginning work on a badge must use what’s listed in the book. Scouting volunteers recognize this publication as the official Boy Scouting requirements resource in effect for the calendar year. Counselors can also access the latest requirements by visiting [www.scouting.org/meritbadges.aspx](http://www.scouting.org/meritbadges.aspx).

Counselors must have the skills and education in the subject matter. Special certification to conduct specific merit badges may also be required. The First Aid merit badge, for example, requires a certified CPR instructor overseeing requirement 3b in order for Scouts to demonstrate proper technique in performing CPR. Special qualifications are covered in topic 7.0.1.1, “Qualifications of Counselors” in the *Guide to Advancement*, accessible at [www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/33088.pdf](http://www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/33088.pdf).

All BSA volunteers, whether merit badge counselors, Scoutmasters, or district or council leaders, must have Youth Protection training every two years. There are no exceptions to this policy.

**Show Me the Blue Card!**

The Application for Merit Badge, No. 34124, also known as the “blue card,” is a Scout’s official record for keeping track of his advancement. It shows when the Scout met with his unit leader to discuss the badge, it lists requirements that have been completed, and it provides helpful information for counselors.

The “blue card” is evidence the Scout and his unit leader met to discuss topics such as goals, talents, and interests. During this step, the Scoutmaster is able to coach the Scout on things he may have overlooked prior to selecting the badge. For example, the Scout must have completed specific rank requirements before he can start work on Lifesaving. If prerequisite work isn’t an issue, the unit leader supports the Scout’s decision by signing and dating the front part of the card and providing contact information for at least one approved counselor.
A partially completed “blue card” shows a Scout had begun working on the badge, and his previous counselor provided the date when requirements were completed along with his or her initials. You will encounter “partials” from time to time, and the Scout’s goal is to resume working on the badge.

Whether meeting with Scouts eager to begin work, or helping those wishing to complete the badge, you should always ask to see the “blue card” before counseling sessions begin. It demonstrates the Scout came prepared to the initial meeting.
Glad You Asked

Web Page for Counselors

An updated BSA Web page for accessing the latest merit badge information is available at: www.scouting.org/sitecore/content/Home/BoyScouts/GuideforMeritBadgeCounselors.aspx.

Counselors will discover fliers for newly released badges such as Mining in Society, Digital Technology, Sustainability, Programming, and Game Design. The page also provides a summary of badges in development and describes how to submit a new badge proposal.

Completing Requirements as Stated Matters

The Camping merit badge has withstood the test of time and continues to be a popular badge. In fact, more than 4.6 million Scouts have earned the badge since 1911. Notwithstanding the badge’s high demand, people still have difficulty understanding requirement 9a:

“Camp a total of at least 20 nights at designated Scouting activities or events. One long-term camping experience of up to six consecutive nights may be applied towards this requirement. Sleep each night under the sky or in a tent you have pitched. If the camp provides a tent that has already been pitched, you need not pitch your own tent.”

The following captures how some parents interpret the allowable long-term camping nights: “My son attended summer camp last year which only offered five nights of camping. He went to summer camp again this year with his troop. Can he apply one night of this year’s summer camp toward the requirement?”

The answer is “No.” Scouts can apply only one long-term camping experience toward the required 20 nights. They cannot include nights camped from a subsequent long-term experience to satisfy the requirement. So, factoring in the allowable five nights, a counselor may pass the Scout on this requirement provided he’s able to show evidence of at least 15 other nights camped at troop overnights, district camporees, and similar Scouting activities.

Perhaps someday, an 11-year-old Scout will write to the National Council to recommend an updated version with little room for misinterpretation. Emphasizing diverse camping experiences, fine-tuning outdoor skills, planning, and engaging in patrol and troop teamwork must be part of the proposal.
News You Can Use

Mining in Society Gaining Momentum

The Society of Mining, Metallurgy, and Exploration collaborated with BSA to develop the Mining in Society merit badge, launched in February 2014. The developers not only wanted Scouts to gain appreciation of the essential nature of mining and how critical it is to sustain society, but also wanted them to have hands-on experiences while working on the badge.

The requirements and pamphlet content were crafted to introduce Scouts to mining industry operations. Scouts get to explore the anticipated benefits of interplanetary mining and learn how NASA and private investors search for, extract, and process minerals in outer space. Other experiences such as visiting an active mine and meeting with a professional may even spark a Scout’s interest in a future mining career while working on the badge.

Mining in Society has proved to be highly popular among youth and adults. Shortly after the badge’s rollout, colleges, state mining institutes, and companies began collaborating with local Boy Scout councils to sponsor well-attended merit badge workshops. In addition to hosting the events, organizations are providing counselors to help mentor the Scouts.

The badge’s high demand is proof positive today’s youth are driven toward technology more than ever before. Developing merit badges that expand Scouts’ horizons into technological careers while teaching them responsible stewardship of our limited natural resources will be the merit badge trend of the future.

Six Pamphlets Now Available in Spanish

For the first time in BSA history, six Eagle-required merit badge pamphlets are available in Spanish. The following are the translated pamphlets:

- Campamento (Camping), No. 619133
- Civismo Comunitario (Citizenship in the Community), No. 619134
- Comunicación (Communication), No. 619137
- Vida en Familia (Family Life), No. 619142
- Excursionismo (Hiking), No. 619144
- Bienestar Personal (Personal Fitness), No. 619146

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Scout shops in 50 predominately Hispanic communities currently stock the pamphlets, which sell at the same price as the English editions. Copies may also be purchased through www.scoutstuff.org/ or by calling the National Distribution Center toll-free at 800-323-0732.

**About Counselor’s Compass**

*Counselor’s Compass* is the official e-letter of the Boy Scouts of America’s Merit Badge Maintenance Task Force. Its intent is to provide volunteers with practical counseling advice through a concise, informative approach in order to communicate advancement procedures more efficiently. Therefore, districts and councils may reprint articles from this publication. Our plan is to distribute *Counselor’s Compass* quarterly, but special editions may go out whenever there is important information to share. Feedback, suggestions, and letters to the editor are welcome at merit badge@scouting.org.

**Helpful Resources**

Access to merit badge requirements:

www.scouting.org/meritbadges.aspx


*The Essentials of Merit Badge Counseling*: www.scouting.org/filestore/training/advancement/merit_badge_counselor/the_essentials.ppt

Merit badge pamphlet series

*Boy Scout Requirements*, No. 33216

*Application for Merit Badge*, No. 34124

*A Guide for Merit Badge Counseling*, No. 34532

*Boy Scout Handbook*, No. 34554

*Merit Badge Counselor Information*, No. 34405
Managing Subscriptions to Counselor’s Compass

*Counselor’s Compass* is designed for merit badge counselors, council and district advancement committees, and related staff advisors. Any Scouting volunteer or professional may subscribe.

**Subscribing.** Send a message to merit.badge@scouting.org, with “SUBSCRIBE” in the subject line. Indicate your name, email address, and council in the message text.

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**Receiving Multiple Copies.** If you receive *Counselor’s Compass* at more than one email address, choose the one to be removed and reply with “REMOVE” in the subject line. Include a message requesting that we remove only that email address.

**Duplicate Copies.** If you receive more than one copy of *Counselor’s Compass* at the same email address, please reply to all but one of them with “DUPLICATE” in the subject line.

**Address Change.** If you want *Counselor’s Compass* sent to a different address, reply and enter “ADDRESS CHANGE” in the subject line. In your message, enter your council name and the email address you prefer.