

Advancement News

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Prepared. For Life.®

As programs and opportunities modify over time, your friends at *Advancement News* will continue to be here to share these changes with you and offer insights. *Advancement News* will be uploaded directly to the [Advancement Resources](#) page of Scouting.org. Each bimonthly edition will be found at the [Advancement News](#) page. Since advancement evolves and occasionally changes, please note that the most current information found in *Advancement News* and the online version of [Guide to Advancement](#) supersedes previous versions.

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Advancement News is designed for council and district advancement committees, advancement staff advisors, and Eagle processors. However, any Scouting volunteer or professional may subscribe. To subscribe to the *Advancement News* announcements, click here: [Subscribe](#)

From the *Guide to Advancement*

When Requirements Change

When advancement requirements change, every effort is made to give as much notice and create as little disruption as possible. Changes to rank requirements and merit badge requirements are communicated as widely as possible – through BSA’s official website (<https://www.scouting.org/topics/program-updates/program-updates-scouts-bsa/>), and other supporting channels such as Bryan’s Blog, *Advancement News*, etc.



Transition guidelines are always provided, but special circumstances may arise making interpretation less clear. How important and impactful the change is for the program must always be balanced against the disruption to Scouts on their advancement journey. New or changed requirements always have an implementation date, and those being phased out are given a specific sunset date. Nevertheless, no matter how much notice is given, or what date is selected, there inevitably will be Scouts who are affected, perhaps by just one day. While the *Guide to Advancement* (current edition 2021) is the ultimate authority on these issues, the examples below may be helpful in understanding some recent changes.

When the Medicine merit badge transitioned to Health Care Professions, the published transition plan was fairly simple. A single date on which one merit badge ended was designated, but provisions were made for those who were working on but had not completed the expiring badge:

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The image is a screenshot of the Boy Scouts of America website's 'Program Updates' page. The header includes the BSA logo and navigation links like 'JOIN US', 'GIVE', 'SHOP', and 'MY.Scouting'. Below the header is a large photo of a diverse group of Scouts and leaders. The main heading is 'PROGRAM UPDATES'. Underneath, there are three categories: 'Awards and Insignia', 'Scouts BSA Program Updates', and 'Sea Scouts Program Updates'. The 'Scouts BSA Program Updates' category is expanded, showing two articles: 'COVID-19 2020 Advancement Temporary Changes' (dated January 9, 2022) and 'COVID-19 Modification roll back' (dated December 28, 2021). Each article has a 'Read More' link. At the bottom of the screenshot, there is a link: 'Program Updates Archives | Boy Scouts of America (scouting.org)'.

Program Updates Archives | Boy Scouts of America (scouting.org)

Sample Updates:

- January 5, 2022 – COVID-19 2020 Advancement Temporary Changes
- December 28, 2021 – COVID-19 Modification roll back
- October 11, 2021 – Scouts BSA Youth Council announcement

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- “Scouts who have begun work on the Medicine merit badge may continue working on it until they are finished or turn 18.” (However, there is no guarantee that merit badge counselors or patches will continue to be available if they wait too long.)”
- “After December 31, 2021, Scouts may not begin working on the Medicine merit badge and should instead work on the Health Care Professions badge.”

The recent addition of the Citizenship in the Society merit badge is a bit more complicated in that it provided two dates specifying a transition period, during which the merit badge can be earned by Scouts but is not yet required for the rank of Eagle Scout.

- “Starting November 1, 2021, Scouts could begin earning this merit badge if they choose. It could be used as an Eagle-required merit badge for the ranks of Star or Life, or as one of their 8 optional merit badges when applying for the rank of Eagle Scout.”
- “Starting July 1, 2022, Citizenship in Society will become required for the rank of Eagle Scout, so there will be 14 specific badges to earn (a few with choices), and 7 optional. This means that any Scout who had not completed all the requirements for the rank of Eagle Scout would have to earn this merit badge before applying for that rank.”

When phasing any merit badge in or out, it is always useful to remember what GTA topic 9.0.1.1 says about the phrase “Complete All the Requirements.” Correctly interpreted and applied, because a board of review may be conducted after a Scout’s 18th birthday, perhaps as many as 24 months afterwards (GTA topic 8.0.0.2), a Scout who has completed all Eagle requirements before July 1, 2022, would NOT have to earn the Citizenship in Society merit badge, even if their board of review was held well after July 1, 2022.

On Increasing Advancement

Positions of Responsibility – The Troop Guide

Troop guide is another of the positions of responsibility that enhances a Scout’s leadership skill set and helps the Scout qualify for their rank advancement. Equally important, and perhaps even more so, a troop guide plays a key role in the retention and advancement for other Scouts in their units. The troop guide should be an older Scout who holds at least the First Class rank and who can work well with younger Scouts.

The *Scouts BSA Handbook* says it best: the troop guide should be an experienced Scout who “introduces new Scouts to troop operations and guides them through early Scouting activities. The troop guide serves as a coach to the patrol leader of the new-Scout patrol, and they work together at patrol leaders’ council meetings. The troop guide helps new Scouts earn the First Class rank within their first 12 to 18 months.”

In fact, some could even argue that because of this role, the troop guide might be one of the most important positions of responsibility within a troop. In the Wood Badge training course for adult Scouters, which in

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many ways models a troop, troop guides mentor patrols through the early part of the course, troop guides present the foundational theme sessions throughout the course, and finally guide the participants towards completion of their “tickets” – after the course. In fact, serving as a troop guide in a Wood Badge course is so important, that it is a required previous position to become a Wood Badge course director – and is recommended as a prerequisite for National Youth Leadership Training (NYLT) course directors.

Considering the importance of this position of responsibility, the senior patrol leader and Scoutmaster should give a great deal of thought when appointing troop guides. More importantly, they should provide every guide with initial and ongoing training and guidance for the duration of their tenures, ranging from the troop guide orientation may be found at <https://troopleader.scouting.org/troop-guide/> and troop-based *Introduction to Leadership Skills for Troops* (ILST) training.

A Gray T-Shirt Tale

[Editor's Note: This is a true story!]

“We were at the church putting away the troop camping equipment after a wonderful week at Scout summer camp. The younger Scouts were busy telling their parents about their weeklong adventure. Older teenage boys were busy ignoring their parents. The Senior Patrol leader and the other troop leaders were busy directing the distribution of troop equipment that had to be taken home to be cleaned. It was a scene of happy chaos.

“One of the Scouts just returning from his first summer camp was Billy S. Mrs. S., Billy’s mother, asked me, “Where did Billy get that gray T-shirt?”

“Why, Mrs. S., I believe that’s the white T-shirt you sent him away in a week ago!”

“Didn’t you make him change his shirt?”

“No, why would I? He was too busy having fun!”

You see, sometimes parents are not thrilled with the smells of wood smoke and body odor that comes home from summer camp. Nor with the sand and mud that accompanies it. We know that each Scout had at least a brief encounter with the showers before polar bear swim each morning before breakfast.

“What do you think Billy did at summer camp that kept him too busy having fun to remember to change his T-shirt? He learned to swim; he fired a .22 rifle; he banged away at clay pigeons with a shotgun; he paddled a canoe on the lake; he learned to build a fire; he chased squirrels through the woods; he rappelled down from the top of the climbing tower; and in the dining hall, he sang camp songs, loudly and off key. In other words, he had a full week of fun. Along the way he may have worked on the requirements for Second, First Class and other advancement, but **(if we did it right)** he probably didn’t notice because he was too busy having fun. He may have even earned a merit badge or two.

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There are lots of changes in today's world. New health regulations abound. It's an exciting new world. But the boys and girls in our program have not changed. They still want to go to summer camp to have fun. Our purpose has not changed. We still want our youth to grow to be great citizens and to be wonderful parents to our grandchildren.

This is the genius of Baden-Powell's program. Make sure your Scouts are having fun at summer camp doing the things that they think are fun. Use all of the methods of Scouting. Make sure that their activities include things that count toward advancement but not to the exclusion of having fun.

Cub Scouts



Den Meetings—Where the Action Happens

This is where all the action happens, the chaos, and the fun. Den meetings are the vehicle which delivers our program content and conveys the aims of the BSA: character development, leadership development, citizenship training, and personal fitness. When designing a den meeting, keep the audience in mind, the boys and girls in the den. Think about their personalities, their physical abilities, their likes, their dislikes and their attention spans. Den meetings should be *fun yet purposeful*.

Den meetings are the heart of Cub Scouting as the Adventures are designed to be age appropriate. Each rank has its own handbook with developmentally appropriate activities. The National Cub Scouting committee works closely with youth development experts in education and safety to meet the needs of the boys and girls in each age group.

To help our den leaders deliver program content, Cub Scouting uses an “advancement trail” for youth to follow. The advancement trail is comprised of a varying number of required and elective Adventures for each rank or grade level. Advancement is the method by which we deliver the program serving both adults and youth:

- Advancement is the method used to help guide den leaders in teaching the aims of the BSA to our youth. It is a road map to success for the den leader. The program is designed so that any adult can conduct a meeting with a group of children by using a set of instructions and activities to be completed to the end goal: Fulfilling the mission of the Boy Scouts of America.
- Advancement is the method that Cub Scouting uses to provide activities for the youth to instill the aims of the BSA in a fun and engaging manner. Using belt loops and pins, awarded immediately after an Adventure is completed, ties recognition to youth behavior. Think of it like a “sticker chart.” This is how behavior is modified, celebrating right away.

Remember: *Advancement is our method of teaching youth, it is not the aim of our program.* Den meetings are where the action takes place, where we have the ability to teach in a way that is specifically designed for a particular age.

For more information on how to run a stellar den meeting, check out the virtual Roundtable videos: [What Makes a Den](#) and [Secret Sauce of Cub Scouting](#).

Mission of the Boy Scouts of America:

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 Law”

Scouts BSA



Camping and Rank Advancement – A Tricky Question

Question: Can advancement requirements be completed on family campouts?

Answer: No, not unless they can.

Scouts go camping, but not always with their troop. If a family goes camping on its own, and the Scouts in that family complete merit badge or rank advancement requirements on that campout, can they be marked as complete? The answer depends on the exact wording of the requirement. If it says “with your patrol” or “on a Scout campout”, then those activities must be completed on a Scout outing. Thus, a family-only campout activity would not meet the requirement. On the other hand, if the requirement says “observe and be able to identify at least 20 species of wild birds”, a Scout could do that with their family – and then explain to the merit badge counselor or unit leadership, what they did. In any case, a Scout could always practice knots, pioneering, etc. on a family campout, then at a later date demonstrate their proficiency to the unit leadership to complete the requirement.

Note that certain COVID-specific accommodations were enacted in June, 2020 to allow some flexibility in completing requirements during a pandemic, however as of March 01, 2022 those have all expired. Visit the [Program Updates page](#) for more information.

Merit Badges

Citizenship in Society – Approving Merit Badge Counselors

For most merit badges, the counselors are professionals or other experts in the subject material. However, for the Citizenship in Society merit badge, the real subject matter concerns the Scout’s own opinions and beliefs. Therefore, for this merit badge, the counselor is not the subject matter expert, but someone who is skilled in listening and in guiding discussions.

Counselors will need to have some expertise in the subject matter (as determined by their local council) before meeting with Scouts. Persons interested in applying to become counselors should be strongly encouraged to first complete the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion volunteer training at https://training.scouting.org/courses/SCO_1800, as it includes integral information on key concepts the Scouts will be studying. They should also review the counselor [facilitation guide](#) available now. Once they have reviewed these resources, they will have a better idea of what is expected, and can make an informed decision as to whether or not they want to apply

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For those who do apply, it should be made clear that for this merit badge, the counselor serves as a facilitator who draws out from the Scout what they have discovered and learned, and how they plan to put those learnings into action. The counselor is not to interject their own opinions and beliefs, but instead should consider the Scout's experience and journey into these topics. The goal is to have openness and depth of conversation.

The role of the counselor is that of a skilled listener and discussion leader, as well as someone informed on key concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion through BSA-provided training and self-guided exploration. The counselor will not be providing answers or resources, but will be engaging the Scout in conversation about what they have learned and how they plan to apply their new knowledge to their life as a Scout and as a good citizen in society.

The counselor must always provide a safe environment for the Scout to discuss these topics and their observations without judgment, ideally in individual or very small group settings – while following all youth protection guidelines. The Scout Oath and Scout Law are the appropriate boundaries to use in these discussions, and the counselor should demonstrate inclusive leadership and how to value everyone's thoughts and opinions. In addition, the counselor should be available to openly communicate with the Scout's parent(s)/guardian(s) if questions or discussions require their assistance.

Merit Badge Counselors from Out of Council?

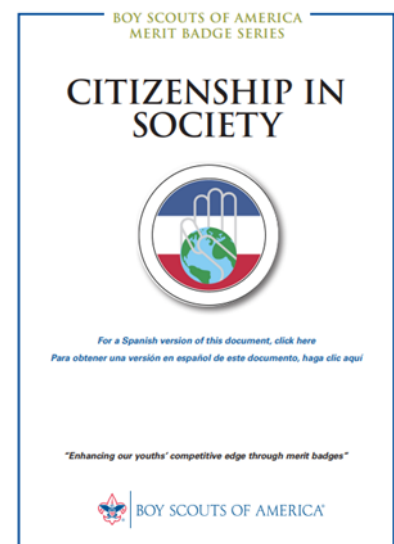
Questions are arising regarding councils limiting Scouts to the use of only in-council merit badge counselors (MBC) for the Citizenship in Society merit badge. The *Guide to Advancement* puts this in a fairly grey area, as it defines the council as making the MBCs and defines MBC as a council position.

Short answer: Councils can set their own rules for approving merit badge counselors for Citizenship in Society, or any other merit badge. However, once a counselor is approved by their home council, they can counsel and approve requirements for any Scout registered in the BSA, anywhere in the world.

For a more detailed explanation, there are two considerations:

1. Approving counselors:

The [Citizenship in Society counselor document](#) mentions on page 2, that Counselors should be both skilled in listening and in guiding discussions, and knowledgeable in the subject matter (as determined by their local council) before meeting with Scouts.



The GTA section 7.0.1.4 says "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 "Supervisory Qualifications and Certifications," 7.0.1.1. "

GTA section 7.0.1.4 says:

"Council advancement committees have the responsibility to implement an approval procedure that assures merit badge counselors have the necessary skills and education to offer quality experiences in the badges they counsel. "

While the GTA is specifically referring to the "risky" merit badges, that section applies to all merit badges, including Citizenship in Society.

So yes, each Council can set their own requirements and policies for approving counselors for this (and every other) merit badge, and they can be more stringent than what national suggests.

2. Working across Councils

GTA Section 7.0.0.1 says "Lacking agreement, the Scout must be allowed to work with the registered and approved counselor of his or her choice. " and "It is acceptable for a counselor registered in one council to approve merit badges for Scouts in another. "

This happens at Jamborees, when troops travel for summer camp, when individuals travel for merit badge universities, and so on. Citizenship in Society is no different from any other merit badge in this regard.

Sea Scouts and Scouts BSA – Advancement Similarities

There is a way to use a double-whammy to advance in Scouts BSA. It's to complete some of the Sea Scouts requirements and apply them to the Scouts BSA advancement.

Marlinspike

Marlinspike is just a fancy word for knots. In Scouts BSA, a youth works on overhand, square, figure eight, bowline, two half hitches, clove hitch and sheet bend knots. Add a cleat hitch – what Scouts BSA can use to tie a rope to a pole after an American flag ceremony – and you have completed the marlinspike section of the Apprentice rank in Sea Scouts, or Requirement 6.

The difference between Scouts BSA and Sea Scouts is that you might use the two half hitches to put up a tent, and a bowline in life-saving activities. All the knots listed above are used on sailboats and ships. Knot knowledge becomes encompassing as you go up to the ranks of Ordinary, Able and Quartermaster. That's why we sometimes call it knot-ical.



Service

The Apprentice rank also requires to log at least eight hours of work on a ship, project or activity, other than regular ship meetings, parties or fun events.

In Scouts BSA, service requirements are:

- Tenderfoot, requirement 7b: One hour of service. Participate in a total of one hour of service in one or more service projects approved by your Scoutmaster.
- Second Class, requirement 8e: Two hours of service. Participate in two hours of service through one or more service projects approved by your Scoutmaster.
- First Class, requirement 9d: Three hours of service. Participate in three hours of service through one or more service projects approved by your Scoutmaster.
- Star, requirement 4: Six hours of service. While a First Class Scout, participate in six hours of service through one or more service projects approved by your Scoutmaster.

Swimming

In Scouts BSA, swimmers must demonstrate the following: Jump feet first into water over the head in depth, level off, and begin swimming. Swim 75 yards in a strong manner using one or more of the following strokes: sidestroke, breaststroke, trudgen, or crawl (no dog-paddle); then swim 25 yards using an easy, resting backstroke. The 100 yards must be completed in one swim without stops and include at least one sharp turn. After completing the swim, rest by floating for one minute.

The Sea Scout requirements for the Apprentice rank for swimming – we'll give you a hint: It's the same.

Scout Oath and Law

Scouts BSA uses the Scout Oath and Law to guide the troop. What does the Sea Scout ship use? Hint: It's the same words. Sea Scouts is just another wing of the Boy Scouts of America. Both groups have to know the Scout Oath and Law. In addition to that, Sea Scouts must know the Sea Promise, something that dates back more than 100 years.

Sea Promise

As a Sea Scout, I promise to do my best:
To guard against water accidents
To know the location and proper use of the lifesaving devices on every boat I board
To be prepared to render aid to those in need
To let those less able come first.

Water fun

There is paddle crafts, sailing, canoeing, life-saving and scuba in Scouts BSA or Sea Scouts? Hint: BOTH.

Sea Scouts vs. Scouts BSA

Scouts who are 14 or a First-Class, can join a Sea Scout ship and have dual membership. They can also work on the Eagle rank in a ship. Most Sea Scout leaders also can double as merit badge counselors for a troop, if the Scout wishes to work on Eagle advancements in the troop only. And this is just the tip of the iceberg of what applies to Scouts BSA from Sea Scouts. Sea Scouts is similar to Boy Scouts -- just add water.

Special Needs

Earning the Special Needs Scouting Service Award

Reprinted from [Abilities Digest](#), Summer 2020.

Scouters who support Scouting with special needs through service to units, youth training, leader training, or organization, may be nominated for the Torch of Gold or Woods Services Award. Both of these require nomination. The Torch is presented by each council once a year, and the Woods Services is presented nationally once a year.

The Special Needs Scouting Service Award (SNSSA) does not require nomination, and may be presented to any adult who earns it. The SNSSA recognizes either adult volunteers or Scouting professionals who actively support Scouting with special needs and disabilities. The SNSSA is similar to the Scouter's Key in that the individual earns it through tenure, training, and service requirements.

To be eligible, the adult must actively participate in activities with youth who have special needs or disabilities at the unit, district, council, area, regional, or national level for at least three years. The adult must also complete six activities from the following list:

- Attend a training seminar or conference on disabilities and special needs sponsored and conducted by the BSA or through an organization that serves youth or adults with disabilities and special needs (e.g., The Arc, blind associations, independent living resource centers, autism societies, Special Olympics).
- Present one of the nationally approved disabilities and special needs classes (e.g., classes within the College of Commissioner Science curriculum or classes prepared by the National Disabilities Awareness Task Force) at any level.
- Serve as a staff member at a district, council, area, regional, or national event on the theme of youth with disabilities or special needs in Scouting.
- Create and organize a unit (pack, troop, or crew) that primarily serves youth with disabilities or special needs, but is open for membership by youth without disabilities or special needs.
- Serve as a mentor for a Scout who has a disability or special need for six months.
- Serve as a group discussion leader on Scouting for youth with disabilities or special needs. Do this at a roundtable or district commissioner meeting or similar gathering of volunteer or professional Scouters.

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About *Advancement News*

Advancement News is the official e-letter of the Boy Scouts of America National Advancement Program Team. Its intent is to provide and clarify procedures found in the *Guide to Advancement*, announce various changes and updates in advancement, and to assist advancement committees in making decisions that can help increase the rate of advancement. Therefore, districts and councils may reprint articles from this publication. Our plan is to distribute six issues of *Advancement News* annually, but special editions may go out whenever there is important information to share. Feedback, suggestions, and letters to the editor are welcome at advancement.team@scouting.org

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- Promote and assist in organizing and conducting an outdoor event for youth with disabilities or special needs, or an outdoor event that promotes disabilities awareness and acceptance among those who don't have a disability.



The candidate should fill out the [SNSSA Application Form #512-067](#). Provide enough detail to clearly show that requirements were completed. Sign the form and turn it in to the local council for approval. Councils who have a Special Needs and Disabilities Committee may delegate the review of such applications to the committee.

Recipients of the SNSSA may wear the Scouting Service Award square knot (item #625334) with the special needs and disabilities device (item #641462). They may also receive the SNSSA medal shown in the photo (item #641463) with its blue and white neck ribbon, and an award certificate (item #649736).

Worth Repeating

Methods of Scouting: Eagle Scout Courts of Honor –

The Difference between the Cake and the Icing

March-April, 2016

As an advancement volunteer, it's a good idea to try to attend every Eagle Scout court of honor to which you are invited. Besides being inspired by a young person's accomplishments, you'll get to meet the unit-level volunteers who make Scouting happen. In addition, they usually serve cake!

Every meeting with unit volunteers is an opportunity to remind them that as exciting as courts of honor are, advancement is not the purpose of Scouting—it is merely one of our methods. Our aim is growth in moral strength and character; participatory citizenship; and development of physical, mental, and emotional fitness. Advancement is just one method that we use to achieve these goals. An Eagle Scout court of honor is a perfect place to remind leaders that advancement is not the cake itself, but rather the icing on the cake.

If units overemphasize advancement, they risk winding up with an unbalanced program that may be attractive to some youth in the short run, but not to all in the long run—which is what we are all about. Units should use all of the methods of Scouting to create and maintain a balanced, exciting program that will keep

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Scouts coming back for more. Advancement should follow as a natural outgrowth of the unit program, not the other way around.

A troop that sets advancement as its only goal may find that every meeting looks like a classroom with Scouts in rows of folding chairs facing someone lecturing on a subject. Scouts may lose interest, and more chairs become empty as the youth drop out of Scouting.

A troop that uses a balanced approach will look different. Early in the program year, the patrol leader's council might use the **patrol method**, as well as the methods of **adult association** and **leadership development**, in deciding to attend the district first aid meet later in the year. First aid review would become a part of **patrol** meetings throughout the year, focusing on Tenderfoot through First Class first aid requirements — which adds **advancement** to the methods employed. Merit badge counselors will be recruited to help Scouts work on the First Aid merit badge, leading to a campout that incorporates first aid scenarios, designed by an assistant Scoutmaster who also is a trained EMT—thus increasing the opportunities for **adult association** and incorporating the **outdoor method**. As Scouts earn their First Aid merit badges and receive them at courts of honor, the methods of **advancement** and **uniform** take their proper places in the program. Some Scouts will continue their **personal growth** by becoming troop instructors in first aid or may even go on to become First Aid merit badge instructors at summer camp.

Thus, using a balanced approach that incorporates all of the methods of Scouting, the troop ends up with a more exciting program, which sustains and renews itself by keeping the youth in Scouting longer, giving them a greater chance of growing into the adults that Scouting hopes they will become. Now isn't that what we're all about?

Editor's Note

This article was written before the inclusion of girls in the Scouts BSA program. Scouts BSA has been substituted for any reference to Boy Scouts, and youth references are for "Scouts" or "Youth".



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Helpful Links

The most current materials of interest for Scouters who are involved in the administration of advancement are located in one handy place. Many resources are available via the Advancement Resources page at www.scouting.org/Advancement

Advancement Educational Presentations

Introduction to the *Guide to Advancement*



Use this [PowerPoint presentation](#) to review and explain that the *Guide to Advancement* is the official source for the administration of advancement for all programs of the Boy Scouts of America. At the beginning of the presentation, it is stressed that changes may occur, and if so, updated information and requirements will be found at the web link for the most current [Guide to Advancement](#)

The presentation further reviews the various sections as to what the section

covers and any pertinent background information. The Appendix of forms is identified and the last page provides guidance on where to find additional information. As with other advancement education materials, note that the expiration date is available on the title page so users can verify that the content is up to date.