



Advancement Education

BSA

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# The Essentials of Merit Badge Counseling

## Expiration Date

This presentation is not to be used after January 31, 2021.  
Obtain an updated version at [www.scouting.org/advancement](http://www.scouting.org/advancement)



# This Training Will Cover

- ♣ Scouting overview: mission, objectives, and methods
- ♣ Merit badge program role and benefits
- ♣ Merit badge counselor qualifications
- ♣ How to become a counselor
- ♣ The merit badge counseling process
- ♣ Merit badge requirements: fulfill as written
- ♣ Effective counseling
- ♣ Group instruction and camp settings



# Boy Scouts of America Mission Statement

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 Scout Law.



# Objectives of the Scouting Program

- ♣ Character development
- ♣ Citizenship training
- ♣ Leadership
- ♣ Mental and physical fitness

Every activity in Scouting should support one or more of these aims.



# Methods of Scouting

- ♣ Scouting ideals
- ♣ Patrol method
- ♣ Advancement
- ♣ Association with adults
- ♣ Outdoors
- ♣ Leadership development
- ♣ Uniform
- ♣ Personal growth

*Guide to Advancement* topic 2.0.0.4



# Four Steps In Scout Advancement

1. The Scout **learns**.
2. The Scout is **tested**.
3. The Scout is **reviewed**.
4. The Scout is **recognized**.



Merit badge counselors  
are directly involved in the first two steps.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 4.2.1.0



# Merit Badges: Their Role in Advancement

- ♣ Merit badges are integral to advancement.
- ♣ Any Scout may earn them at any time, including qualified Venturers and Sea Scouts.
- ♣ Merit badges are required for Star, Life, and Eagle.
- ♣ A total of 21 must be earned for the Eagle rank.
- ♣ Some merit badges are “required;” some “elective.”
- ♣ Thirteen of the seventeen specific badges are required for Eagle.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.0.1



# Broad Range of Subjects

More than 130 merit badges in 14 subject areas:

Agribusiness

Arts and crafts

Business and industry

Communications

Conservation

Hobbies

Natural science

Personal development

Physical science

Professions

Public service

Sports

Trades

Transportation





# Benefits of Merit Badges

- ♣ Contribution to the objectives of Scouting: citizenship, character, leadership and fitness
- ♣ Development of confidence, self-reliance, and social skills
- ♣ Physical fitness and healthy lifestyles
- ♣ Career and hobby choices may result
- ♣ Exposure to positive role models:



**You!**

# Qualifications to Become a Merit Badge Counselor

- ♣ At least 18 years of age
- ♣ Good character
- ♣ Recognized as having skills and education in the subject area
- ♣ Good rapport with leaders and Scout-age youth



# Special Certifications and Trainings

Specific training is required for some BSA activities, including merit badges.



A counselor *must* hold the specific certification or work with someone who does.

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.1.1



# Registering as a Merit Badge Counselor

- ✦ Even if already registered, every counselor must submit a BSA adult application for the position of merit badge counselor (code 42). There are no exceptions.
- ✦ Merit badge counselors who are re-registering need not complete a new application.
- ✦ “Merit badge counselor” is a council or district position.
- ✦ Approval of merit badge counselors is the responsibility of the council advancement committee, not the unit.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.1.5



# Forms Needed to Register as a Merit Badge Counselor

## ADULT APPLICATION

This application is also available in Spanish. [Enter selected text into a document as required.](#)

Your participation in the BSA can help youth become better citizens.

Adult leaders serve as important role models for youth in the BSA and this application aids the chartered organization in selecting qualified adult volunteer leaders.

**Youth Protection Training**

All adult applicants are required to take this training in order to complete the adult application process. Go to [my.Scouting.org](http://my.Scouting.org) to create an account and take the training online or contact your local council for classroom training. Include a copy of your completion certificate with this application.

**Mission**

The mission of the BSA 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 Scout Law.

**Criminal Background Check\***

In order to complete the adult application process, you will need to review the different disclosures that have been separately provided to you. The separate authorization form must be signed and returned when you submit your application.

**Excerpt From the Declaration of Religious Principle**

The BSA maintains that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God and, therefore, recognizes the religious element in the training of the member, but it is absolutely nonsectarian in its attitude toward that religious training. Its policy is that the home and organization or group with which the member is connected shall give definite attention to religious life. Only persons willing to subscribe to these precepts from the Declaration of Religious Principle and the Bylaws of the BSA shall be entitled to register.

\*The four different background check forms must be form off and each separately given to the applicant.


BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

### Boy Scouts of America MERIT BADGE COUNSELOR INFORMATION

(Please type or print legibly.)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Primary phone: \_\_\_\_\_  Home  Cell  Work  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Other phone: \_\_\_\_\_  Home  Cell  Work  
 City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Other phone: \_\_\_\_\_  Home  Cell  Work  
 Email address: \_\_\_\_\_  do not have email  
 District: \_\_\_\_\_ UHF  Troop  Crew  Phila.  SEA ID: \_\_\_\_\_  
 am not affiliated with a district.  am not affiliated with a unit.

**\*Required field. Primary phone and email address indicate how Scouts should contact you.**

**To qualify as a merit badge counselor, you must:**

- Be at least 18 years old and of good character.
- Be registered with the Boy Scouts of America (position code 42).
- Complete Youth Protection Training.
- Be recognized as having the skills and education in the merit badge subjects covered and hold any required qualifications and training as outlined in the Guide to Scouting or the Guide to Advancement—or use others as qualified.
- Be able to work with Scout-age boys.

**As a merit badge counselor, I agree to:**

- Follow the requirements of the merit badge, making no exceptions or additions, ensuring that the advancement standards are fair and uniform for all Scouts.
- Have a Scout accompanied by his leader during all individual sessions.
- Keep my Youth Protection training current.
- Renew my registration annually if I plan to continue as a merit badge counselor.

Merit Badges For more than eight merit badges, attach additional sheets.	Add (A) Drop (D)	For each merit badge, list qualification(s) that support your request. Qualifications could include college degrees, formal training certificates, previous merit badge and specific life experiences.
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		

A = Adding a new merit badge that you will counsel to the roster. D = Removing your name from the roster for this merit badge.

**Complete the following:**

This is a new application (first time to register as a merit badge counselor).  
 Match this form to the BSA Adult Application, indicating position code 42.  
 This is an update to an existing list of merit badge subjects.  
 I no longer wish to serve as a merit badge counselor.

Youth Protection training date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Attach copy of the current certificate.)

I agree to work with:  
 All Scouts  
 All Scouts in these districts:  
 Only with Scouts in these units (indicate whether troop, team, or crew):

Counselors are encouraged to be available to assist ordinary Scout leaders only.

I plan to serve as a merit badge counselor for this event or outside organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Council Approval:**

Name (Print): \_\_\_\_\_  
 Position: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Use position code 42.

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.1.5



# Complete Youth Protection Training



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Sign in to MyScouting

User Name:

Password:

[Forgot your User Name or password?](#)  
[Frequently asked questions](#)

New to MyScouting?

Create an account to:

- take Youth Protection and other BSA training
- access unit, district, and council tools
- register for events
- keep in touch with members and alumni

\*Some of these tools require a Member ID.

This page is not intended for users under 13 years of age. Jamboree youth registration must be completed by a parent or guardian from the parent or guardian's MyScouting account. For a detailed privacy policy, click the Privacy Policy link below. For best performance, use Internet Explorer 7.0 & above or FireFox 3.0 & above.

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Good for

2 YEARS

[www.my.scouting.org](http://www.my.scouting.org)

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.1.1



# Approval by Local Council

- ❖ Local councils establish procedures for registration, re-registration, approval, and for reviewing:
  - Background checks
  - Youth Protection training
  - Any council-required certifications
- ❖ Approval is for specific merit badges.
- ❖ Counselors may work with just one unit, but registration and council advancement committee approvals are still required.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.1.4



# The Process of Counseling

- ♣ A Scout develops an interest in a subject.
- ♣ Scouts indicate their interest and discuss the badge with their unit leader.
- ♣ The unit leader signs a blue card and provides at least one counselor.
- ♣ The Scout contacts a counselor.
- ♣ The Scout and counselor meet—often several times.
- ♣ The requirements are fulfilled.

*Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.3.0*





# The Process of Counseling

- ♣ The counselor approves completion and signs the blue card.
- ♣ The Scout returns the signed blue card to their unit leader for signature.
- ♣ The unit leader gives the Scout the applicant record section.
- ♣ The unit reports the merit badge as advancement.
- ♣ The merit badge is presented.

*Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.3.0*



# The Merit Badge Process

Scout indicates interest;  
discusses with unit leader;  
gets MBC name and blue card



Scout contacts counselor



Scout/counselor first meeting



Subsequent Scout/counselor meetings



Scout completes requirements



Counselor approves completion  
and retains the Counselor  
portion of the blue card



Scout returns completed  
merit badge card to unit leader



Unit reports advancement and  
obtains badge for presentation



# Application for Merit Badge

## *The Blue Card*

### The unit leader signature:

- ♣ Required for Scouts to work with counselors
- ♣ Does not indicate unit leader “approval”
- ♣ Evidence of discussion between unit leader and Scout
- ♣ Indicates registered counselor has been recommended
- ♣ Not required for Scout to get started on requirements

“I have discussed this merit badge with this Scout and recommended at least one merit badge counselor.”

APPLICATION FOR MERIT BADGE

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

is a registered  
 Boy Scout  Varsity Scout  Venturer  
of \_\_\_\_\_ No. \_\_\_\_\_  
Troop, team, crew, ship

District \_\_\_\_\_

Council \_\_\_\_\_

I have discussed this merit badge with this Scout and recommended at least one merit badge counselor.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature of unit leader \_\_\_\_\_

BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

34124

# Application for Merit Badge

## *The Blue Card*

**Information for Applicant**

- A merit badge application can be approved only by a registered merit badge counselor.
- You must have a buddy with you (Scout buddy system) at each meeting with the merit badge counselor.
- Turn in your approved application to your unit leader. You will be awarded the merit badge emblem and certificate at a suitable occasion.

**Information for Counselor**

- Merit badge applications must be signed in advance by the applicant's unit leader.
- The Scout must have his buddy (Scout buddy system) in attendance at all instructional sessions.
- You may not change any requirement, but you may share your knowledge or experience that will make the counseling more interesting and valuable.

SKU 34124  
7 30176 34528 4  
34124 2012 Printing  
©2012 Boy Scouts of America

Counselor Initial	Date of approval	Requirement No. and letter	Counselor Initial	Date of approval	Requirement No. and letter

**APPLICATION FOR MERIT BADGE**


Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_

is a registered  
 Boy Scout    Varsity Scout    Venturer  
of \_\_\_\_\_ Troop, team, crew, ship No. \_\_\_\_\_

District \_\_\_\_\_  
Council \_\_\_\_\_

I have discussed this merit badge with this Scout and recommended at least one merit badge counselor.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature of unit leader \_\_\_\_\_

 BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA  
34124

← Scout's information

↑  
Record of completed requirements

# Application for Merit Badge

## *The Blue Card – Reverse Side*

Counselor's information →

Counselor signs in *two* places → once all requirements are complete

Unit leader's second signature

1/3 goes to the unit as application for the badge

1/3 goes to Scout for their record

1/3 goes to the counselor's records

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.0.2

# Role of a Merit Badge Counselor

Interview the Scout to determine:

- ♣ Their preparedness
- ♣ Their current knowledge
- ♣ Their interest

In subsequent meetings:

- ♣ Evaluate progress
- ♣ Review completed work



# Role of a Merit Badge Counselor

## *Coaching:*

- ♣ Teach required skills.
- ♣ Provide opportunities to practice.
- ♣ Provide encouragement, and also praise when appropriate.
- ♣ Encourage goal setting and provide help and support in reaching goals.
- ♣ Evaluate progress and respond accordingly.



# Role of a Merit Badge Counselor

## *Mentoring:*

- ❖ Establish a relationship, taking a genuine interest in the Scout's projects.
- ❖ Spark curiosity.
- ❖ Go for the deeper dive.
- ❖ Encourage long term goal-setting.





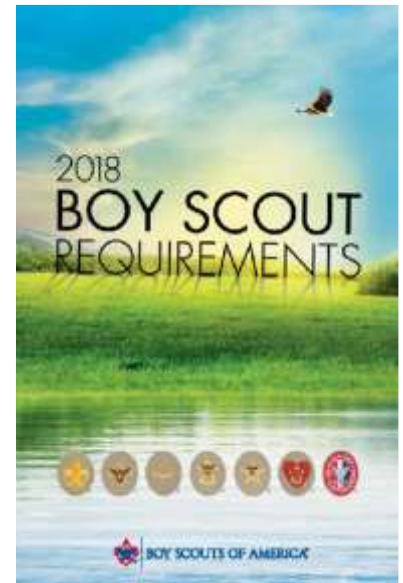
# Merit Badge Requirements

## Finding current requirements for a merit badge

- ♣ *Boy Scout Requirements* (current edition)
- ♣ Merit badge pamphlet (latest printing)
- ♣ [www.scouting.org/advancement](http://www.scouting.org/advancement)

## Are the requirements flexible?

- ♣ No; they must be fulfilled as written.
- ♣ Wording matters!
- ♣ “Show,” “demonstrate,” “describe,” “make,” “list,” etc., are to be taken literally.



# Meeting More Than One Requirement at a Time

*A single activity may fulfill more than one requirement if...*

- ♣ Requirements match and have the same intent.
- ♣ It is not specifically disallowed.
- ♣ The Scout remembers safety content.
- ♣ Common sense suggests that meeting the requirement more than once is unnecessary.

**More work will be needed if requirements are only *similar*.**

Guide to Advancement topic 4.2.3.6



## ***Policy on Unauthorized Changes to Advancement Program***

No council, committee, district, unit, or individual has the authority to add to, or subtract from, advancement requirements.

There are limited exceptions relating only to youth members with disabilities. For details see section 10, “Advancement for Members With Special Needs.”

–*The Guide to Advancement*, No. 33088



# Scouts with Special Needs

- ❖ Merit badge requirements must not be waived or changed for any Scout.
- ❖ Scouts with disabilities—either permanent, or expected to last at least two years or beyond age 18—still may advance.
- ❖ The “Application for Alternative Eagle Scout Rank Merit Badges” may be found at:  
[www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-730.pdf](http://www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-730.pdf)



Guide to Advancement section 10



# Tips for Counseling

Make Scouts feel  
welcome  
and relaxed.



- ♣ First impressions matter.
- ♣ Ask a few simple questions.
- ♣ Show them something related to the subject.
- ♣ Invite them to demonstrate a simple skill.
- ♣ Remember: This is Scouting. Have fun.



# Tips for Counseling

Use the EDGE method.

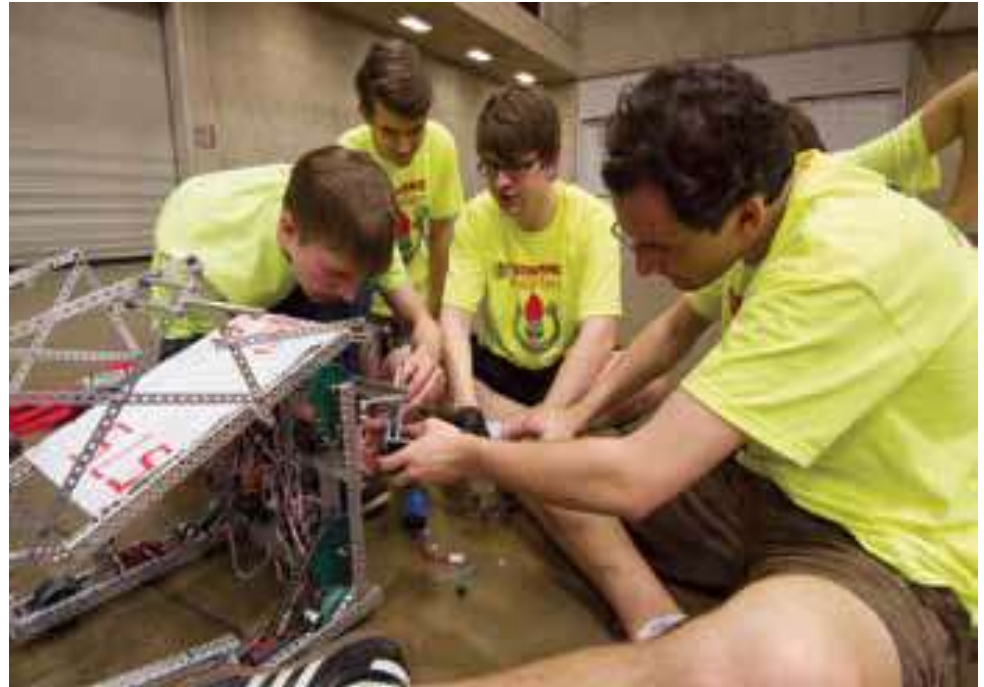
- ♣ **E**xplain
- ♣ **D**emonstrate
- ♣ **G**uide
- ♣ **E**nable



# Group Instruction

## Benefits

- ♣ Guest experts
- ♣ Interactive learning
- ♣ Slide shows, skits, demonstrations, and other dynamic approaches



## The Challenge

*Every Scout must actually and personally fulfill every requirement as written.*

*Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.3.2*



# Group Instruction

## Ensuring Quality

- ✦ Limit group instruction to cases where the benefits are compelling.
- ✦ See that all counselors are registered and approved.
- ✦ Establish processes where counselors confirm prerequisites have been completed.
- ✦ Report any issues to the council advancement committee.





# Camp Settings

- ❖ No exemption from merit badge counselor qualifications.
- ❖ Staff members under 18 may assist, but must work with qualified counselors.
- ❖ Instruction must be done in accordance with the “group instruction” procedures found in the *Guide to Advancement*.



*Guide to Advancement* topics 5.0.1.3 and 7.0.3.2



# Merit Badge Events

- ❖ Merit badge fairs may provide an overview or introduction to multiple badges.
- ❖ It should be rare that Scouts begin and finish badges at one- or two-day events.
- ❖ Prerequisites should be made known early.
- ❖ Scouts must actually and personally fulfill all requirements.



*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.3.2



# Merit Badge Events

- ♣ Only minimal fees should be charged for events.
- ♣ Events staged as fundraisers are discouraged.
- ♣ Non-Scouting organizations or businesses are not allowed to use protected BSA trade names, images, logos, or artwork without national BSA permission.
- ♣ Non-Scouting organizations must have local council approval to present classes that are for the sole purpose of earning merit badges.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.4.9 and 7.0.4.10



# Worksheets and Learning Aids

- ♣ Merit badge “worksheets” from the Web or other sources are unofficial, but may aid in learning.
- ♣ These tools must relate to current BSA requirements, which still must be fulfilled as written.
- ♣ Worksheets may be used to meet “in writing” requirements.
- ♣ Worksheets are not a substitute for “telling,” “showing,” or “demonstrating,” etc.
- ♣ Scouts must not be required to use them.

*Guide to Advancement* topic 7.0.4.8



# Completing the “Partial” Blue Card

- ♣ The merit badge counselor records and initials the front of the card in the middle section as each requirement is completed.
- ♣ The back of the card is not signed in either place until ***all*** requirements are fulfilled.
- ♣ Partials do not expire as long as the Scout is a registered youth member.
- ♣ Accepting a “partial” is at the follow-up counselor’s discretion.

Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.3.3



## ***Once It's Earned, It's Earned***

A Scout who has earned a merit badge from a registered and approved counselor by actually and personally fulfilling the requirements as written, will have met the purpose of the merit badge program and the contributions to the objectives of Scouting. The badge is theirs to keep and count.



Guide to Advancement topic 7.0.4.6



# A Second Counselor Review May Be Warranted If...

- ❖ A Scout, to whom it has been made clear that only registered and approved counselors are to be used, chooses to ignore this mandated procedure.
- ❖ It becomes plainly evident that it could not have been possible for a Scout to actually and personally fulfill requirements as written. In this case a limited recourse is available, according to the details outlined in topic 7.0.4.7.

*Guide to Advancement topics 7.0.4.6 & 7.0.4.7*



# Addressing Merit Badge Myths

1. At what age or rank may Scouts work on merit badges?
2. What is the maximum number of merit badges a Scout may work on at the same time?
3. Is a Scout allowed to begin work on a merit badge without their unit leader's approval?
4. If a Scout has too many unfinished merit badges, may the unit leader limit how many others they may begin?





# Addressing Merit Badge Myths

5. Is it appropriate to tell a Scout they must earn all or most of the Eagle-required badges before they earn any others?
6. Is the Scoutmaster permitted to serve as a troop merit badge counselor for some merit badges like Camping or Hiking?
7. What is the maximum number of badges a youth may earn from one counselor?
8. How many badges may one counselor be approved to counsel?



# Addressing Merit Badge Myths

9. May you counsel your own son or daughter?
10. May you counsel in other units, districts, or councils?
11. Due to tight schedules, is a camp staff member allowed to make minor adjustments so requirements can be finished at camp?
12. Once you are registered and approved as a counselor, at what point must you re-register and become re-approved?
13. When does a “partial” expire?



# Merit Badge Myths – Review

1. At what age or rank may Scouts work on merit badges?

There is no limit if registered as a Scout.

2. What is the maximum number of merit badges a Scout may work on at the same time?

There is no limit.

3. Is a Scout allowed to begin work on a merit badge without their unit leader's approval?

Yes. Approval is no longer required; a discussion is now held before contacting a counselor.



# Merit Badge Myths – Review

4. If a Scout has too many unfinished merit badges, may the Scoutmaster limit how many others he or she may begin?

No. During the discussion of a new merit badge, the Scoutmaster should provide counseling on what to do.

5. Is it appropriate to tell a Scout he or she must earn all or most of his Eagle-required badges before the Scout earns any others?

A Scoutmaster can only suggest this.



# Merit Badge Myths – Review

6. Is the Scoutmaster permitted to serve as a troop merit badge counselor for some merit badges like Camping or Hiking?

This is permitted *only* if the unit leader is registered and approved as a counselor for that badge.

7. What is the maximum number of badges a youth may earn from one counselor?

There is no BSA limit. A unit leader may set a limit, but it must apply to all Scouts in the unit.



# Merit Badge Myths – Review

8. How many badges may one counselor be approved to counsel?

The national office places no limit on this. Councils may do so, within reason.

9. May you counsel your own son or daughter?

Yes, but generally it is better for Scouts to learn from a variety of adults.

10. May you counsel in other units, districts, or councils?

Yes.



# Merit Badge Myths – Review

11. Due to tight schedules, is a camp staff member allowed to make minor adjustments so requirements can be finished at camp?

**Absolutely not.**

12. Once you are registered and approved as a counselor, at what point must you re-register and become re-approved?

**Annually.**

13. When does a “partial” expire?

**When the youth is no longer eligible to register as a Scout.**



# Merit Badge Counselors

- ♣ Share passion
- ♣ Teach skills
- ♣ Touch lives





# For More Information

Other advancement presentations available at:

[www.scouting.org/advancement](http://www.scouting.org/advancement)

## Resources

- *Guide to Advancement*, No. 33088
- BSA's *Guide to Safe Scouting*, No. 34416
- Merit badge pamphlets
- *Boy Scout Requirements*, No. 33216
- Application for Merit Badge, No. 34124
- *A Guide for Merit Badge Counseling*, No. 512-065
- *Scouts BSA Handbook* (previously Boy Scout Handbook)
- Merit Badge Counselor Information, No. 34405
- BSA Adult Application, No. 524-501
- Merit Badge Group Instruction Guide, No. 512-066

