

COUNCIL EXECUTIVE BOARD ADDRESSES MERIT BADGE DAYS:

Merit badges have long been a cornerstone of the Boy Scouts of America program, allowing Scouts to try different hobbies, explore career opportunities, and even learn skills that could save their lives, or that of someone else. Group merit badge instruction, or “Merit Badge Days,” which have been widely practiced in the Orange County Council and elsewhere, can be a very effective way for Scouts to learn and earn badges. In order to maintain the quality of group merit badge instruction, the National Council of the Boy Scouts of America has prescribed certain rules for this type of learning environment in its [Guide to Advancement](#).

Because of concerns raised by leaders and parents, our Council's Executive Board recently affirmed the importance of these national policies and agreed that all merit badge instruction for groups of Scouts from more than a single unit conducted in the Orange County Council would comply with them. In many cases, this will entail no structural change to the way a Merit Badge Day is conducted. After all, many of these events are of very high quality, adhering rigorously to the standards of advancement that any leader or parent would desire. In others, it may require some changes.

Below are the specific actions our board has taken in order to standardize and improve a Scout's merit badge day experience across our Council. These will be put into place June 1, 2015 and will apply to merit badge days offered to Scouts from multiple units, but not an event that targets just one troop's own membership:

- 1. The Council Advancement Committee will develop a list of merit badges that are amenable to group instruction with specific guidance on which requirements should be met as prerequisites rather than met during a group session.*
- 2. The Council Advancement Committee will assist districts in conducting regularly scheduled Merit Badge Counselor Training programs to certify registered Merit Badge Counselors and will facilitate sharing of Merit Badge Counselor lists between Districts to allow greater access to registered counselors.*
- 3. The Council Advancement Committee will create a certification process for those entities (units and Council camp facilities) that desire to conduct merit badge group instruction serving multiple units and will work with Districts to*

arrange for on-site observation of merit badge events that serve more than one unit to help ensure compliance with these guidelines.

- 4. Many badges require at least a full day's instruction to maintain the integrity, challenge and full exploration of the subject matter. In general, even when prerequisites are met in advance, a Scout should not be able to earn more than two merit badges in a single day group event. Additionally, class size should be limited to a maximum of eight Scouts per Merit Badge Counselor, preferably less when the Merit Badge Counselor determines a significant need for individualized instruction.*
- 5. The Council Executive Board has directed the Council Advancement Committee and Council Staff, including District Executives, to work with units wanting to conduct Merit Badge Days with budget preparation and assistance in the approval process. Further, as is our policy for fee based events that involve multiple units, participant registration and collection of fees for Merit Badge Day events will be coordinated the by Orange County Council as a service to the host unit.*
- 6. In accordance with BSA Advancement Guide section 7.0.4.10 (see footnote):
As a BSA Best Practice, Merit badge instructional events or other events conducted to serve more than one unit, should not be used as a fundraising activity. Fees charged to participants should be limited to recovering the costs related to presenting the opportunity and not budgeted for profit or fundraising.*

There are other policies outlined in the Guide to Advancement that may also apply to these events. Our Council Executive Board wishes to help units ease the transition to closer compliance with these national guidelines and has directed the Staff and Council and District leadership to work with units in making the transition as smooth as possible. The Council will review the requirements for conducting Merit Badge Days with those units that have historically conducted them and widely disseminate this information through electronic media and Round Tables. Council staff will make available to Districts and units instruction on approval and registration forms to be used for Merit Badge Days conducted on or after June 1, 2015. Council leadership will reach out to those units that have been historically involved with conducting these events to assist with ideas to reduce negative program impact on their units caused by this new direction.

The Orange County Council sincerely appreciates the efforts of units and others who organize group merit badge instruction to enhance the Scouting experience for Scouts in our movement. We stand ready to work with you to continuously improve our program.

(BSA ADVANCEMENT GUIDELINES) 7.0.4.10 Charging Fees for Merit Badge Opportunities

Council, District, and multiunit merit badge fairs have become increasingly popular over the past several years. While they provide a service to our Scouts, they should not be presented as fundraisers. There are many other methods available to raise the funds necessary to operate the Scouting programs at any level.

Although charging fees for merit badge fairs, clinics, or similar events is not prohibited, any fees charged should be limited to recovering the costs related to presenting the opportunity. Local Councils and Districts may also include in the fee a reasonable contribution to the council's overhead and administrative costs. Using merit badge events as fundraisers, however, is discouraged, and Councils may exercise their authority not to approve them....The Boy Scouts of America is proud of its tradition of volunteer service. It does not endorse merit badge opportunities where fees are paid directly to individuals, or to groups of individuals, especially if the individuals are looking to Scouting as a source of income that could be considered taxable. The Council Advancement Committee should not approve merit badge counselors who will not honor the tradition of volunteer service.