



10.0.0.0 Section 10.

Advancement for Members With Special Needs

Youth and adults with special needs or disabilities are welcome in Scouting America. As outlined in this section, there are various ways to facilitate advancement for them. These youth, and the adults that participate like youth, are usually members of mainstream units and participate alongside all the other youth. While there are special-purpose units that serve members with special needs or disabilities and these can be beneficial in some situations, no one is required to join one.

When knowledgeable parents, guardians, or volunteers are able to provide assistance and oversight, almost anyone can be a member. While leaders should be enthusiastic about helping those with special needs, they should also recognize demands will be placed on their patience, understanding, and skill in working on advancement.

10.1.0.0 Advancement Flexibility Allowed

Cub Scouts, Scouts BSA, Venturers, or Sea Scouts who have disabilities may qualify for *limited flexibility* in advancement. Accommodations possible in each program are outlined below. It does not necessarily matter if a youth is approved to be registered beyond the age of eligibility. Experience tells us those members whose parents or guardians are involved, or at least regularly consulted, progress the farthest. Some units have also followed the example set by Individualized Education Plans, and have established “individual Scout advancement plans” with the same benefits.

A sample ISAP, Individual Scout Advancement Plan, No. 512-936, found in the appendix and at www.scouting.org/advancement, may prove helpful. The council advancement committee should be consulted if there are concerns about accommodations, but the table below may be helpful.

	ACCOMMODATION	MODIFICATION (rare)
Definition	Change HOW Scouts are learning	Change WHAT Scouts are learning
Example	Offer extra time; take swim test at quieter time of day; allow assistive devices (glasses, hearing aids, augmentative and alternative communication devices, etc.)	Earn Pioneering merit badge instead of Camping merit badge
Who Can Approve	Unit-level decision, by Cubmaster, Scoutmaster, merit badge counselor	Council Advancement Committee
Documentation Required	None	Individual Scout Advancement Plan (rank) and/or Alternative Eagle Scout Rank Merit Badges Application

10.1.1.0 Advancement for Cub Scouts With Special Needs

Advancement is so flexible that, with guidance, most Cub Scouts with disabilities can complete requirements as is. The standard is, “Has the Cub Scout done his or her best?” It may take Cub Scouts with disabilities longer to attempt requirements and demonstrate their best, but the accomplishments will be rewarding to all involved.

There could be times, however, when a Cub Scout’s “best” isn’t enough even to get a start. For example, a youth in a wheelchair cannot pass requirements calling for walking or running. In these cases, Cubmasters and pack committees may jointly determine appropriate substitutions that are consistent with the Cub Scout doing his or her best. For example, elective requirements could take the place of those required. Or in consultation with a parent or guardian, other minor adjustments representing similar challenges could be made. Decision-making authority rests at the pack (unit) level, as they are the ones most familiar with the situation.

10.1.2.0 Advancement in Scouts BSA for Scouts With Special Needs

Members must meet current advancement requirements as written for merit badges, all ranks, and Eagle Palms—no more and no less—and they are to do exactly what is stated. If it says, “Show or demonstrate,” that is what they must do; just “telling” isn’t enough. The same holds for words and phrases such as “make,” “list,” “in the field,” “collect,” “identify,” and “label,” and so on. However, words and phrases such as “list,” “report,” and “make a presentation” do not specify that the product has to be in a particular format—for example handwritten, typed, a verbal address, memorized, or through the use of photographs. Requirements have been carefully constructed so as not to unnecessarily restrict the format or method for completing a requirement. The convenience, preferences, or traditions of the person assessing the work must not add to the requirement. For example, a task that is usually done outdoors or on a campout does not necessarily have to be, unless specified in the requirement.

It is important to remember that the advancement program is meant to challenge our members. Even Scouts with special needs and disabilities need to learn from striving for something. However, not all of them will achieve everything they might want to—whether or not they have a disability.

For boards of review for Scouts with special needs, the board members should be informed ahead of time about the special circumstances and needs. It may be helpful to have the unit leader and or parent or guardian present at or before the review, to answer questions and provide background on challenges and how the Scout copes with

them. Parents or guardians may be present at the meeting—especially if they are able to help interpret and communicate what the Scout is saying. Families and unit leaders are allowed to attend a board of review, but not required, and their attendance will change the experience for the Scout. The advantage of their attendance must outweigh the disadvantages for the Scout.

10.1.2.1 Open-Minded Flexibility

Allowances for Scouts BSA members are made in three ways. The simplest is an open-minded reading of the requirement, after learning about the Scout and how the special need or disability affects that Scout. If the requirement can be met as written, but in an unconventional or creative way, that is sufficient.

10.1.2.2 Accommodations

The next level of allowance for special needs and disabilities is an “accommodation.” An accommodation changes how the requirement is completed without changing the requirement itself. An accommodation is authorized at the unit level and does not require supplemental documentation.

For example, if a Scout uses a piece of equipment in regular life to accomplish tasks, the Scout is allowed to use the same equipment while performing the requirement. Not only does this include physical devices like glasses, braces, crutches, and wheelchairs, it also includes text-to-voice readers for low vision/dyslexia/nonverbal, voice-to-text apps for hard of hearing/dysgraphia, hearing aids, and many other support devices. How a Scout “walks,” “talks” and performs other tasks in their life should be the way that a Scout completes a merit badge.

Equipment designed for organized adaptive sports competitions should be permitted for Scouts that meet the competitive criteria for the adaptive sport. An example of this would be a mouth-operated release device for archery, an audio/laser sighting device for blind shooting, or a special prosthetic for running.

Accommodations can also be changes in when, where, or how the task takes place. An activity can be moved from outdoors to indoors or vice versa. Better lighting or a quieter workspace can be allowed. Simply allowing work at a slower pace or a task to be completed in multiple sessions could make the difference, and is allowed unless expressly prohibited in the requirement.

10.1.2.3 Modifications

A “modification” is a change in the requirement itself or the substitution of one requirement task for another.

A modification is appropriate when a disability makes it impossible or nearly impossible to complete a requirement. Modifications are not permitted at the unit level and require additional approvals in advance.

Modifications require the approval of the council advancement committee. The primary interest should be the best interests of the Scout, understanding that a Scout needs a challenge, but the challenge must be reasonable under the unique circumstances of that Scout. The committee does not need to be a gatekeeper, and should keep in mind that these situations are unique, so no precedent will be set with these decisions.

Ideally, the council advancement committee will include members with knowledge or experience working with people with special needs or disabilities, or will work with a council Special Needs committee that does.

The application process for modifications requires a health professional with qualifications related to that disability to explain in writing what disability exists and that a Scout requires a modification. A council advancement committee without appropriate expertise should not supersede the assessment of that professional. It is reasonable to ask for clarification when a supporting document is not clear. (See chart in Section 10.1.1.0.)

10.1.2.4 Using Alternative Requirements

Requests for alternative requirements for Scout, Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class ranks can be made using the information outlined below.

Alternative requirements are not available for the Star, Life, and Eagle ranks. Scouts may request approval for alternative merit badges, but the other requirements for those three ranks must be fulfilled as written.

Some members may be unable to complete all the rank requirements for the Scout, Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class ranks as a result of a disability that is permanent or is expected to last for longer than two years. Scouts who are unable to complete all the requirements for Scout, Tenderfoot, Second Class, or First Class rank may, with their parent or guardian, and also the unit leader or a member of the troop committee, submit a request to the council advancement committee to complete alternative requirements. Unless a Scout has been approved to register beyond the age of eligibility, alternative requirements must be completed by the Scout's 18th birthday. This avenue is also available to youth with longer-term medical conditions (such as those related to a severe injury) who want to continue advancing during treatment and recovery.

An alternative requirement can take two forms. It can be a modified version of the original requirement, such as reducing the distance of a hike or swim, allowing a flotation aide, or allowing the Scout to receive prompts for a task that requires memorization. Or, it can be a complete substitution of a task that it is possible for the Scout to do in place of one that is impossible.

No Scout can be asked to do the impossible. But an

alternative requirement needs to provide a similar learning experience to the original and a similar level of challenge to what any non-disabled Scout would experience.

The outcomes of the Scouting experience should be fun and educational, and not just relate to completing rank requirements that might place unrealistic expectations on a member who has special needs.

10.1.2.5 How to Apply for Alternative Rank Requirements

The unit leader or a troop committee member submits to the council advancement committee a written request for alternative requirements for Scout, Tenderfoot, Second Class, or First Class ranks. Requests can be made at more than one point in the Scout's career to allow for the Scout to make progress, while still allowing for future growth or changes in the disability to come to light.

The request must identify the requirement(s) that the Scout cannot do and suggest alternatives for those requirement(s). The request needs to explain how they know the Scout cannot do the requirement. In some cases that will be obvious, but often it is not obvious until the Scout has attempted the requirement. If an attempt was made, to the best of the Scout's ability, the request should provide a description of what transpired. The request should explain why growth in size, strength, intellectual or social ability as the Scout gets older will not enable the Scout to complete the requirement within two years.

Scouts regularly surprise their adult leaders and parents by being able to do more than adults expected. That is why we prefer to see a good faith attempt made at a requirement before approving an alternative requirement.

The request must be accompanied by supporting letters from the unit leader, a parent or guardian, and the Scout (if possible), as well as a written statement from a health professional with qualifications related to the disability.

This may be, for example, a physician, neurologist, psychiatrist, psychologist, etc., or when appropriate, an

SWIM TEST. *It is permissible to modify the conditions of the beginner and swimmer level swim tests for advancement purposes only. Passing a modified version of the test does NOT qualify the Scout to use a higher level swim area.*

educational administrator in special education. Statements must describe the disability; cover the Scout's capabilities, limitations, and prognosis; and outline what requirements cannot be completed. Additional information such as Individualized Education Plans provided to parents by schools, and various treatment summaries and reports, may help the council advancement committee make an informed decision.

Normally, it is expected that youth with only moderate learning disabilities, or such disorders as ADD or ADHD can—albeit more slowly—complete standard requirements.

The council advancement committee reviews the request. To make the best determination, the committee may want to interview the Scout, the Scout's parent(s) or guardian(s), and the unit leader. The committee's decision is then recorded and delivered to the Scout and the unit leader. The committee is not restricted to approving or disapproving the application as presented. It may be in the best interest of the Scout to approve in part, approve with some changes, or to set a future date to reconsider the decision so the Scout has time to grow and mature before making a final decision. It is in everyone's best interest to process and decide on applications promptly. If a family is asked to wait, they need to be told how long it will be before the application can be reconsidered.

After the committee's decision has been recorded and delivered, any supporting private information should be returned to its source—the parent or guardian, or institution that provided it. Should there be questions about its disposition, then the supporting private information should be destroyed.

Note that topics 10.1.2.4 and 10.1.2.5 do not apply to merit badge requirements. See topic 10.1.2.6 to learn about earning alternative merit badges to those required for Eagle.

10.1.2.6 Alternative Merit Badges for Eagle Scout Rank

Individual requirements within a merit badges may not be modified or substituted. Open-minded flexibility (topic 10.1.2.1) and accommodations (topic 10.1.2.2) are allowed for individual requirements. When a youth with special needs cannot complete an Eagle-required merit badge, the youth may request approval for an alternative badge that they can complete. This is allowable on the basis of substituting one merit badge with a similar learning experience and level of challenge for another.

Scouts with special needs must complete all merit badge requirements as written. No substitutions for individual requirements are allowed.

A Scout must do as much as possible on an Eagle-required merit badge before an alternative is requested. This is because Eagle-required merit badges teach crucial life skills, and all Scouts should achieve as much as they can in each of these areas – and may surprise their leaders by being able to accomplish more than expected.

Merit badges are substituted “whole cloth” —one (or more) for one, but individual requirements cannot be modified. The substitute must offer a similar learning experience, challenge, and level of difficulty, taking into consideration how much was achieved on the Eagle-required merit badge. The alternate merit badge can be one they have started, but not one that they have completed.

An Application for Alternative Eagle Scout Rank Merit Badges (www.scouting.org/advancement), can be submitted after a Scout has earned First Class. The application must identify the merit badge(s) that the Scout cannot do and suggest an alternative merit badge(s) for those the Scout cannot do.

Requests can be made at multiple points in the Scout's career to allow the Scout to make progress, while allowing for future growth or changes in the disability to come to light. The member does not need to be registered beyond the age of eligibility.

Alternative merit badges must be completed by the 18th birthday, unless the member is registered beyond the age of eligibility (see “Registering Qualified Members Beyond Age of Eligibility,” 10.2.0.0). A member that is registered beyond the age of eligibility may apply for alternative merit badges like any other member.

The completed application form is sent first to the district advancement committee and is then routed to the council advancement committee. It must be accompanied by supporting letters from the unit leader, a parent or guardian, and the Scout (if possible), as well as a written statement from a health professional with qualifications related to the nature of the disability. This may be, for example, a physician, neurologist, psychiatrist, psychologist, etc., or when appropriate, an educational administrator in special education. Statements must describe the disability and cover the Scout's capabilities, limitations, and prognosis. The statements need to explain how it is known that the Scout cannot complete the merit badge requirements. In some cases that will be obvious, but in many instances it is not obvious until the Scout has attempted the requirement. If an attempt was made, the statements should provide a description of what transpired, and how much the Scout was able to accomplish. The statements should explain why growth

in size, strength, intellectual or social ability as the Scout gets older will not enable the Scout to complete the requirement within two years. Additional information such as Individualized Education Plans provided to parents by schools, and various treatment summaries and reports, may help an advancement committee make an informed decision.

The council advancement committee reviews the application, using the expertise of professionals involved with youth who have disabilities. To make a fair determination, the committee may want to interview the Scout, the Scout's parent(s) or guardian(s), and the unit leader. The committee's decision should be recorded and delivered to the Scout and the unit leader. Once this is done, the Scout may work or continue with a merit badge counselor on the approved alternative merit badges. These must not be merit badges previously earned.

After the committee's decision has been recorded and delivered, any supporting private information should be returned to its source—the parent or guardian, or institution that provided it. Should there be questions about its disposition, then the supporting private information should be destroyed.

When applying for the Eagle Scout rank, a candidate with disabilities must attach the approved Application for Alternative Eagle Scout Rank Merit Badges to the Eagle Scout Rank Application. The form can be found at www.scouting.org/forms. It is important to remember that requirements for merit badges cannot be changed in any way, and all requirements must be completed as written.

10.1.2.7 Approval for Special Needs Eagle Candidates Over Age 18

Individuals age 18 and older, properly approved by the council executive board or designated committee to register beyond the age of eligibility, may apply for the Eagle Scout rank. Since they are considered youth members for as long as they are so registered, they do not need a time extension; nor is special permission needed for an Eagle Scout board of review that is held more than 24 months after the 18th birthday. A letter from the council advancement committee or Scout executive, indicating the member is 18 or older and registered beyond the age of eligibility, must accompany the Eagle Scout Rank Application. If the candidate is not so registered, but should be, then the procedures under "Registering Qualified Members Beyond Age of Eligibility," 10.2.0.0, must be followed. Work completed during any gap in registration may be credited, with council approval.

Eagle Scout candidates who have disabilities but who do not qualify for registration beyond the age of eligibility must complete all requirements before the 18th birthday. In rare cases, however, they may qualify for an extension of time. See "Time Extensions," 9.0.4.0.

10.1.3.0 Advancement for Venturers and Sea Scouts With Special Needs

With a parent or guardian, Venturer-age or Sea Scout-age youth with disabilities must consider the programs presented by individual crews or ships. The activities involved must fit within the capabilities of the prospective member. Discussions with crew Advisors or ship Skippers can reveal what is possible and what is not. Generally, crews may be more able to offer flexibility for members with disabilities than ships. For example, safety concerns onboard a vessel may present barriers difficult or impossible to overcome.

10.1.3.1 Working Toward Scouts BSA Advancement

Qualified Venturers and Sea Scouts with disabilities, who are working on Star, Life, or Eagle ranks or Eagle Palms, must meet the same requirements and follow the same procedures as outlined for Scouts BSA. See especially "Alternative Merit Badges for Eagle Scout Rank," 10.1.2.6.

10.1.3.2 Working Toward Venturing Ranks

The candidate must meet all current rank requirements. There are no substitutions or alternatives permitted except those specifically stated in current requirements, or as outlined below or set forth in official literature, or where crew Advisors have been provided flexibility with certain ranks. The Venturer is expected to meet requirements as stated—no more and no less. If it says, "Show or demonstrate," for example, that is what he or she must do; just telling about it isn't enough. The same holds true for such words or phrases as "make," "list," "in the field," "collect, identify, and label," and so on. However, words and phrases such as "list," "report," and "make a presentation," do not specify that the product has to be handwritten, typed, a verbal address, memorized, or through the use of photographs. Requirements have been carefully constructed so as not to unnecessarily restrict the format or method for completing a requirement. The convenience, preferences, or traditions of the person assessing the work must not add to the requirement. For example, a task that is usually done outdoors or on a campout does not necessarily have to be, unless specified in the requirement.

Requests for alternative requirements for Venturing, Discovery, Pathfinder, and Summit ranks, and the various Venturing awards may be made, however, using the same qualifications and process outlined under "How to Apply for Alternative Requirements," 10.1.2.5. As with alternative requirements for Scout through First Class ranks, we must be dealing with disabilities expected to last more than two years or beyond age 21. Council advancement committee approval for alternative requirements is required in the same way, but to approve those for Venturing, the committee must involve an adult with thorough knowledge

of Venturing advancement and awards. Unless a Venturer has been approved to register beyond the age of eligibility, alternative requirements must be completed by the 21st birthday.

10.1.3.3 Working Toward Sea Scout Ranks

All current Sea Scout rank requirements must actually be met by the candidate. There are no substitutions or alternatives permitted except those specifically stated in current requirements, or as outlined below or otherwise set forth in official literature. The Sea Scout is expected to meet the requirements as stated—no more and no less. If it says, “Show or demonstrate,” for example, that is what he or she must do; just telling about it isn’t enough. The same holds true for such words or phrases as “teach,” “lead,” “take command,” and so on.

With the full cooperation of a ship committee and Skipper, it may be possible for some youth with disabilities to participate in Sea Scout advancement. The requirements are specific, not based on interchangeable merit badges, and they build from rank to rank. The prospective member, with parent or guardian, should review the requirements to determine whether advancement is feasible with reasonable flexibility. If ship leaders agree, then the same qualifications and process apply, as outlined under “How to Apply for Alternative Requirements,” 10.1.2.5. As with alternative requirements for Scout through First Class, we must be dealing with disabilities expected to last more than two years or beyond age 21. Council advancement committee approval for alternative requirements is required in the same way, but to approve those for Sea Scouts the committee must involve an adult with thorough knowledge of Sea Scout advancement and rank requirements. Unless a Sea Scout has been approved to register beyond the age of eligibility, alternative requirements must be completed by the 21st birthday.

10.2.0.0 Registering Qualified Members Beyond Age of Eligibility (RBAE)

Youth members and adults who are disabled in a way that makes it very hard for them to learn or perform like most people their age may be considered for registration beyond the ages of eligibility: age 11 or older for a Cub Scout, 18 or older for a Scouts BSA member, or 21 or older as a Venturer or Sea Scout. Requests to extend registration beyond the age of eligibility for youth members and adults on the basis of developmental disability or cognitive impairment may be submitted at any time. Requests for youth members on the basis of severe physical challenges must be received before they reach the end of age eligibility for the program. For example, a request for a youth member to extend participation in the Scouts BSA program must be received before the youth reaches the 18th birthday.

Registration Beyond the Age of Eligibility (RBAE) is intended to serve two distinct kinds of participants.

One group is adults with significant intellectual disabilities who can enjoy and benefit from a Scout experience. They can join Scouting at any age, even if they were never Scouts when they were young.

The other group is people that joined Scouting while they were age eligible, but for whom it has become apparent to their leaders and families that they would function better with people that are younger than themselves. They have delayed intellectual or social development that is profound enough that they can only advance at a much slower rate than most Scouts.

RBAE is not appropriate for most types of disabilities or for moderate levels of learning, developmental, or intellectual disability. Even with a disability, a young adult should go on to living like a young adult, rather than remaining a Scout indefinitely. An adult that is appropriate for RBAE usually has a guardian or conservator to help to manage finances, living arrangements, and medical care.

RBAE is intended to allow a chronological adult to participate in the Scouting program as a youth member. It allows for continuing advancement, including the Eagle rank, but its benefits go beyond advancement.

Note that RBAE is intended as a permanent arrangement to allow ongoing participation as a youth member. This is NOT a “time extension,” which is available in the rare case of an extreme unforeseen circumstance or life-changing event. Extensions of time are available only for the Eagle Scout, Summit, and Quartermaster ranks. Extensions have specific end dates and may or may not involve disabilities. See “Time Extensions,” 9.0.4.0.

Adults with intellectual disabilities often see themselves as adults. Even when the person qualifies in every other respect for RBAE, before enrolling them as a youth participant through RBAE, consider whether the person would benefit more and fit better in Scouting as an adult volunteer who is supported by the other unit leaders. This arrangement often fits the social development of the person better.

Once a member is granted RBAE, that Scout participates in all the aspects of their level of Scouting program. An RBAE member is eligible for accommodations for advancement previously discussed.

More information and resources on working with Scouts who have special needs:
www.scouting.org/resources/disabilitiesawareness

10.2.0.1 Possible Criteria for Registering Beyond Age of Eligibility

Every case must be considered individually. If members are able to take advantage of the flexibility already built into Scouting advancement, and participate in essentially the same way as typical youth, then they must not be registered beyond the age of eligibility.

In general, a candidate eligible for RBAE functions socially and intellectually at a level that is clearly lower than their age level. There are any number of conditions that can result in a lower functional level and there are combinations of conditions that have a cumulative effect of a lower functional level. The necessary medications for a condition may also impact functioning. For these reasons, there is not a list of conditions that will or will not qualify someone for RBAE. It is the combined effect that matters.

An application for RBAE for an adult requires a letter from a health professional that confirms the person's intellectual abilities are less than the regular upper age limit of the applicable Scout program.

10.2.0.2 How to Register a Member Beyond Age of Eligibility

To register an individual who will participate as a youth member beyond the age of eligibility, the following documents must be assembled and submitted to the local council. The Request for Registration Beyond the Age of Eligibility, No. 512-935, found in the appendix and at www.scouting.org/advancement, should be submitted in addition to:

1. A letter from a parent or guardian describing the disability and its severity and permanence, and petitioning the council for approval of registration beyond the age of eligibility.
2. A completed youth application or proof of current membership for individuals under the age of 18, or a completed adult application for individuals 18 years of age and older.
3. A completed and signed Scouting America Annual Health and Medical Record form (parts A, B, and C), which is available online at www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/ahmr.
4. A signed statement from a qualified health professional attesting to the nature of the disability, its severity, and permanent limitations connected with it. The health professional should have a specialty related to the disability.

5. A letter from the unit leader advocating and supporting the registration.
6. Other supporting documentation, such as pertinent parts of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), treatment summaries, etc., which are optional, but can make a difference in the decision.

If done well, and available from the parents, an Individualized Education Plan can give valuable information on how to work with an individual Scout and help the Scout achieve at the best of their abilities.

The council executive board must approve requests directly, or delegate action to a council operating committee or other group of responsible volunteers at the council level. This may or may not be the council advancement committee. Individual cases must be carefully deliberated. Consideration of registration beyond the age of eligibility must not be delegated to any district or to any single individual, either professional or volunteer. If granted, the Scout executive prepares an approval letter and sends it to the Scout's parent or guardian and unit leader or committee chair. A copy of the letter is retained in the unit's registration file for as long as the member remains registered. When entering the member's data, the council registrar follows procedures outlined in the most current edition of the National Council's *Registration Guidebook*.

Once the Scout executive's letter is prepared and filed, and the member is entered as registered beyond the age of eligibility, any supporting private information should be returned to its source—the parent or guardian, or the institution that provided it. Should there be questions about its disposition, then the supporting private information should be destroyed.

Members approved for registration beyond the age of eligibility may continue working on advancement, including the Eagle Scout rank and Eagle Palms, for as long as they continue to be so registered. The local council or the National Council, upon uncovering evidence that a youth was improperly registered beyond the age of eligibility or for whatever reason no longer meets the required level of severity, may make the decision to expire the registration. Registration of an adult as a youth member beyond the age of eligibility may also be expired if it is determined the registrant has progressed sufficiently to become registered as an adult.