



## 10.0.0.0 Section 10.

# Advancement for Members With Special Needs

Youth with physical disabilities and youth and adults with developmental or cognitive challenges are welcome in the Boy Scouts of America. As outlined in this section, various accommodations exist to facilitate advancement. These youth do not need to join a special unit oriented to serving members with disabilities, although those exist and may be beneficial in some cases. The severity of disability will indicate how members should be registered. See “Registering Qualified Members Beyond Age of Eligibility,” 10.1.0.0.

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 the demands that will be placed on their patience, understanding, and skill in working on advancement.

### 10.1.0.0 Registering Qualified Members Beyond Age of Eligibility

Youth members and adults who are developmentally disabled or cognitively impaired, or youth members with severe physical challenges, 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.

A disability, to qualify an individual for registration beyond the age of eligibility, must be permanent and so severe that it precludes advancement even at a rate significantly slower than considered typical. If ranks can be achieved under accommodations already provided in

official literature or with modifications as outlined below, then the disability probably does not rise to the level required. This is often the case in considering advancement potential for youth who have only moderate learning disabilities or such disorders as ADD/ADHD. If ranks can be earned, but it just takes somewhat longer, registration beyond the age of eligibility is not warranted.

Note that registration beyond the age of eligibility is intended as a permanent arrangement to allow ongoing participation as a youth member. This is different from a “time extension,” which is available to a Scout working toward Eagle rank should certain circumstances arise that preclude timely achievement. Extensions of time are available only for the Eagle Scout, Summit, and Quartermaster ranks. Extensions have specific end dates and they may or may not involve disabilities. See “Time Extensions,” 9.0.4.0.

### 10.1.0.1 Possible Criteria for Registering Beyond Age of Eligibility

In considering registration beyond the age of eligibility, members with conditions, such as those listed below, may meet the severity requirement, but 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.

Examples of conditions that, if severe, may be criteria that qualify an individual for registration beyond the age of eligibility include the following:

1. Developmental
2. Emotional
3. Deaf or Hard of Hearing
4. Learning Disability
5. Intellectual Disability
6. Physical Disability
7. Blind or Low Vision
8. Multiple Disabilities

If an application submitted for an adult is based upon severe and permanent “cognitive disability,” the letter from the medical professional must correlate cognitive abilities to less than the upper limit of the applicable program eligibility age. “Multiple coexisting disabilities” refers to a diagnosis of two or more disabilities, none of which alone may be significant enough to warrant registration beyond the age of eligibility. For example, sight or hearing impairment, or other physical disabilities, or a moderate learning disability or ADHD may be insufficient for qualification on its own. It is possible, however, when considered in combination with other disabilities, including medications involved, that the cumulative impact may rise to the level of the severity requirement.

*Find additional information and resources on working with Scouts who have special needs at [www.scouting.org/resources/disabilities-awareness/](http://www.scouting.org/resources/disabilities-awareness/).*

### 10.1.0.2 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](http://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 BSA Annual Health and Medical Record form (parts A and C), which is available online at [www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/ahmr](http://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. For physical disabilities, this must be a licensed physician; for developmental or intellectual disabilities a licensed psychologist or psychiatrist, or as appropriate, a neurologist or other medical professional in 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 his or her 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 shall 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.

### 10.2.0.0 Advancement Flexibility Allowed

Cub Scouts, Scouts, Venturers, or Sea Scouts who have disabilities may qualify for *limited flexibility* in advancement. Allowances 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](http://www.scouting.org/advancement), may prove helpful.

### 10.2.1.0 Advancement for Cub Scouts With Special Needs

Advancement is so flexible that, with guidance, most Cub Scouts with disabilities can complete requirements. 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.

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

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

It is important to remember that the advancement program is meant to challenge our members; however, not all of them can achieve everything they might want to—with or without a disability. It is for this reason all Scouts are required to meet the requirements as they are written, with no exceptions.

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, too, if the unit leader is present at the review. He or she may be able to help answer questions and provide background. It may be important to allow parents or guardians to be present at the meeting as well—especially if they are able to help interpret and communicate what the Scout is saying. At the least, parents or guardians should be available to help board members understand the challenges and how the Scout copes with them.

#### 10.2.2.1 Using Alternative Requirements

A degree of modification in advancement requirements may be necessary to mainstream as many members with disabilities as possible. Thus a Scout with a permanent physical or cognitive disability, or a disability expected to

last more than two years, or beyond age 18, who is unable to complete all the requirements for Scout, Tenderfoot, Second Class, or First Class rank may, with his or her 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. The procedures appear below. This avenue is also available to youth with longer-term disabilities (such as those related to a severe injury) who want to continue advancing during recovery.

Simple modifications very close to existing requirements need not be approved. A Scout in a wheelchair, for example, may meet the Second Class requirement for hiking by "wheeling" to a place of interest. Allowing more time and permitting special aids are also ways leaders can help Scouts with disabilities make progress. Modifications, however, must provide a very similar challenge and learning 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.*

#### 10.2.2.2 How to Apply for Alternative Requirements

Before applying for alternative requirements, as many of the existing requirements must be completed as possible. Once the Scout's best has been done to the limit of the Scout's abilities and resources, 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. It must show what has been completed and suggest the alternatives for those requirements the Scout cannot do.

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 qualified health professional 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; 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, using the expertise of professionals involved with youth who have special needs. 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 is then recorded and delivered to the Scout and the unit leader.

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 10.2.2.1 and 10.2.2.2 do not apply to merit badge requirements. See topic 10.2.2.3 to learn about earning alternative merit badges to those required for Eagle.*

### 10.2.2.3 Alternative Merit Badges for Eagle Scout Rank

Though individual requirements for merit badges may *not* be modified or substituted, youth with special needs may request approval for alternative badges they *can* complete. This is allowable on the basis of one entire badge for another. To qualify, a Scout or qualified Venturer or Sea Scout must have a permanent physical or cognitive disability, or a disability expected to last more than two years, or beyond age 18. The member does not need to be registered beyond the age of eligibility. Before applying, the Scout must earn as many of the Eagle-required merit badges as possible. However, where a permanent disability clearly precludes completing specific merit badges, a Scout who has earned at least First Class may apply for an alternative merit badge without waiting until all other Eagle-required merit badges are complete. Any alternatives must present the same challenge and learning level as those they replace, and 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," 10.1.0.0).

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

Upon finishing the Eagle-required merit badges that are possible, the Scout, with his or her parent or guardian, reviews the details covered on page 1 of the Application for Alternative Eagle Scout Rank Merit Badges, which is posted on the Advancement Resources web page at [www.scouting.org/advancement](http://www.scouting.org/advancement). 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 qualified health professional 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; cover the Scout's capabilities, limitations, and prognosis; and outline why the merit badge(s) cannot be completed. 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. All alternative badges should be included on just one form.

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 begin working 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](http://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.

### 10.2.2.4 Approval for Special Needs Eagle Candidates Over Age 18

Individuals age 18 and older, properly approved by the council executive board 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," 10.1.0.0, must be followed.

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 some cases, however, they may qualify for an extension of time. See "Time Extensions," 9.0.4.0.

### 10.2.3.0 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.



#### 10.2.3.1 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," 10.2.2.3.

#### 10.2.3.2 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.

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," 10.2.2.2. As with alternative requirements for Scout through First Class ranks, we must be dealing with permanent physical or cognitive disabilities, or in the case of Venturers, 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.

#### 10.2.3.3 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," 10.2.2.2. As with alternative requirements for Scout through First Class, we must be dealing with permanent physical or cognitive disabilities, or in the case of Sea Scouts, 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.