



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 or volunteers are able to provide assistance and oversight, most 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 and adults who are developmentally disabled, or youth with severe physical challenges, may be considered for registration beyond the age of eligibility for their program: age 11 or older for a Cub Scout, 18 or older as a Boy Scout or Varsity Scout, or 21 or older as a Venturer or Sea Scout. An adult of any age who has developmental disabilities, for example, may be considered for *youth* membership and join Scouting if a qualified medical professional is able to correlate cognitive abilities to less than the upper limit of an eligibility age. Members approved to be so registered are indicated in the system with a disability code.

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 normal. 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, the option 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 in the Scouting program. This is different from a “time extension,” which is available to a young man working toward the Eagle Scout rank should circumstances not due to his choice or fault arise that preclude achievement before his 18th birthday. Extensions of time are available only for the Eagle Scout and Quartermaster ranks, they 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 a youth for registration beyond the age of eligibility include these:

1. Autism spectrum disorders
2. Blind or sight-impaired
3. Deaf or hard of hearing
4. Developmental cognitive disability
5. Developmental delay
6. Down syndrome
7. Emotional or behavioral disorder
8. Physically disabled
9. Traumatic brain injury
10. Multiple coexisting disabilities

“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 but when considered in combination may qualify. For example, a youth with a moderate learning

disorder related to ADHD may not be approved to register as a Boy Scout after age 18. If another disability also exists, however, the cumulative impact including that from medication can be significant.

Find additional information and resources on working with Scouts who have special needs at <http://www.scouting.org/specialneeds.aspx>.

10.1.0.2 How to Register a Member Beyond Age of Eligibility

To register a person who will remain as a youth member beyond the age of eligibility, the following documents must be assembled and submitted to the local council.

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 membership application or proof of current membership
3. A completed and signed Annual BSA Health and Medical Record form (parts A and C), online at <http://www.scouting.org/HealthandSafety/ahmr.aspx>
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 cognitive issues, 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 an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), treatment summaries, etc., which are optional, but can make a difference in the decision

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

The council executive board must approve petitions 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 advancement

committee. Individual cases must be deliberated upon. 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 is retained in the unit's registration file for as long as the member remains registered. Upon entering the member, the council registrar selects the appropriate code based on the nature of the disability, and follows any other procedures as outlined in the most current edition of the *Registrar Procedures Manual*, No. 524-901. The national Membership Resources Team is available to assist as needed.

Young people 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 with a disability code, 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 with a disability code may also be expired if it is determined the registrant has progressed sufficiently to be registered as an adult.

10.2.0.0 Advancement Flexibility Allowed

Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Varsity 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 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.

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 he done his best?" It may take him longer to attempt requirements and demonstrate this, but his accomplishments will be rewarding to him, his parents, and his leaders.

There could be times, however, when a Cub Scout's "best" isn't enough even to get a start. For example, a boy 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 showing he can “do his best.” For example, elective requirements could take the place of those found in achievements. Or in consultation with parents, other adjustments representing similar challenges could be made.

10.2.2.0 Advancement for Boy Scouts and Varsity 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 Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class ranks can be made using the information outlined below.

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 should be available to help board members understand the Scout’s challenges and how he 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 mental disability (or a disability expected to last more than two years or beyond the 18th birthday) who is unable to complete all the requirements for Tenderfoot, Second Class, or First Class rank may, with his 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 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 requirement 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.

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.

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, members must complete as many of the existing requirements as possible. Once they have done their best to the limit of their abilities and resources, the unit leader or a troop committee member submits to the council advancement committee a written request for alternative requirements for Tenderfoot, Second Class, and 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 member (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 an 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 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, his 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.

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 mental 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 with a disability code. Before applying, he must earn as many of the Eagle-required merit badges as possible. 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 parent or guardian, reviews the detailed requirements covered in the Application for Alternative Eagle Scout Rank Merit Badges. The completed application 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 member (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 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, his 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.

When applying for the Eagle Scout rank, a candidate with disabilities must attach the Eagle Scout Rank Application to the approved Application for Alternative Eagle Scout Rank Merit Badges. The form can be found at <http://www.scouting.org/forms.aspx>. 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

Men age 18 and older, properly approved by the council executive board to register beyond the age of eligibility with a disability code, 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 three months after the 18th birthday. A letter from an advancement committee or Scout executive, indicating the member is 18 or older and registered with a disability code, must accompany the Eagle Scout 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 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 Boy Scout 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 Boy Scouts. See especially “Alternative Merit Badges for Eagle Scout Rank,” 10.2.2.3.

10.2.3.2 Working Toward Venturing Awards

The candidate must meet all current award 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 awards. 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 Bronze, Gold, Silver, Ranger, Quest, and TRUST 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 Tenderfoot through First Class ranks, we must be dealing with permanent physical or mental 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 his 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 Tenderfoot through First Class, we must be dealing with permanent physical or mental 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.

