

California Inland Empire Council
Council Advancement Committee

Online Merit Badge Class Policies & Instructions

This California Inland Empire Council (CIEC) policy is to ensure that all Merit Badges earned in an online setting are instructed and earned in compliance with the aims and goals of scouting. It is perfectly appropriate to have scouts earn merit badges online, however it is important that we follow the principles of the Merit Badge plan. The National Executive Board provides this policy statement on Merit Badge counseling:

To the fullest extent possible, the Merit Badge counseling relationship is a counselor– Scout arrangement in which the scout is not only judged on his performance of the requirements, but receives maximum benefit from the knowledge, skill, character, and personal interest of his counselor. Group instruction and orientation are encouraged where special facilities and expert personnel make this most practical, or when scouts are dependent on only a few counselors for assistance. However, this group experience should be followed by attention to each individual candidate’s projects and his ability to fulfill all requirements.

Registered merit badge counselors or Nova counselors/Supernova mentors may work with youth using digital platforms, ensuring that all youth protection measures noted in the [Guide to Safe Scouting](#) and [BSA’s social media guidelines](#) are in place. In addition to youth protection, the advancement guidelines in [Guide to Advancement \(GTA\) Section 7](#) are required.

In the end, **the Scout must accomplish all of the merit badge requirements (no more/no less) and be reviewed individually by the counselor** using interactive online tools.

General Guidelines for All Online Merit Badge Instruction

- A. The Council Advancement Committee shall:
 - 1. Post this policy on the Council’s Advancement website;
 - 2. Publicize the policy through the District Roundtables;
 - 3. Maintain current District Merit Badge Counselor lists;
 - 4. Receive and give prompt review to all applications for Online Merit Badge events.

- B. Online Merit Badge Events must comply with the following:
 - 1. Online class size shall be limited to a typical patrol size (8 to 10 scouts) for each counselor, to provide sufficient opportunity for individual review with each Scout.

Council virtual camp limited up to a ratio of 25 participants per counselor with approval of curriculum by Council advancement committee. Class sizes can be larger but follow the 1:25 ratio with review and management by Council or Camp supporting staff.

2. The Online discussions between a counselor and the scout(s) should be highly “interactive” using some kind of online learning tool (e.g., zoom, google hangout, skype, facetime, google duo, etc.). Simply having a scout email a filled-out merit badge workbook is NOT considered to be interactive.
3. Online Merit Badge sessions must be held with adequate time to include appropriate instruction and discussion with regard to the merit badge being presented.
4. Each online class must be taught by a qualified and certified Merit Badge counselor who is registered (for the Merit Badge they are instructing) within a California Inland Empire Council District. All event counselors must be trained in the aims of Scouting and in advancement procedures, and are required to have their Youth Protection Training current.
5. Merit Badge requirements cannot be altered in any way to fit an online course. Simply showing the Scout how to do a requirement does not meet the requirement for the Scout to demonstrate the requirement.
6. First Aid Merit Badge - requirement 3b requires current Red Cross or equivalent certification for CPR instruction. If the Merit Badge Counselor is not certified, any currently certified adult may conduct this training in support to the First Aid Merit Badge Counselor. Include a copy of the certification in the online merit badge process event documentation signed by the event point of contact.
7. The Guide to Advancement (No. 33088 - latest revision) specifies merit badges which have additional qualifications and certifications required of either the Merit Badge counselor or the person supervising.

General Supervision Requirements – Guide to Advancement No. 33088 (latest revision):
Swimming and watercraft activities must be conducted in accordance with BSA Safe Swim Defense or BSA Safety Afloat, respectively, and be supervised by mature and conscientious adults at least 21 years old and trained in the program applicable. Counselors for merit badges involving swimming or the use of watercraft must be so trained, or use others who are.
CPR instruction, wherever it is required, must be taught by instructors currently trained by a nationally certified provider. Several such providers are mentioned in the *Guide to Safe Scouting*.

C. Advancement standards must be maintained:

1. The Scout must be reviewed individually by the counselor to ensure that he/she has met all of the requirements. This is possible using interactive online learning tools.
2. Partial credit must be given for partial completion of a Merit Badge and the completed requirement(s) must be signed off by the counselor on the Merit Badge application (online blue card, see CIEC webpages to download) by the conclusion of the event.
3. The Scout will follow the following steps to complete a Merit Badge online...
 - a. Download the electronic blue card from the CIEC website.
 - b. Contact the unit leader for approval to begin work on the Merit Badge, obtain a signature on the electronic blue card, and get contact information for counselors that they contact for help.
 - c. Contact the counselor and begin work on the merit badge.
 - d. Once completed, obtain the completed blue card from the counselor with requirements and electronic signatures. (or a partial if not completed)

e. Contact the unit leader to complete the electronic blue card which will then be forwarded to the units advancement coordinator to input into Scoutbook.

Additional Guidelines for Group Online Merit Badge Events When More Than One Counselor and More Than 10 Scouts Will Be Included The Following Applies

- D. Council Advancement Committee application approval should be requested at least 30 days in advance of the event date. The request must include:
1. A completed California Inland Empire Council Application for an Online Merit Badge Event with appropriate attachments.
 2. Proposed publicity flier(s) showing the date, web address, times, and Merit Badges offered. No fliers or other publicity may happen prior to approval by the California Inland Empire Council Advancement Committee and the Council Advancement Committee Advisor.
 3. When circulated after approval, the flier(s) must note the approval of the event by the California Inland Empire Council Advancement Committee.
- E. Online Merit Badge Event Fees
1. Online Merit Badge fees are to cover the costs of running the event and are not to be used as a fundraiser.
- F. Any publicity fliers must state that Scouts who cannot afford the registration fee will be allowed to apply to the event sponsors for a scholarship.
- G. Organization responsibilities include:
1. Complying with this policy and all other BSA activity and advancement policies.
 2. Providing a list of all counselors and their contact information for Scouts to follow- up and complete the partially approved badges.
 3. Provide Merit Badge counselors that have been certified.
- H. CIEC Online Approved Merit Badges and Prerequisites: See the recommended CIEC Group Merit Day prerequisite list on the Advancement website.
1. No online Merit Badge sessions will be approved for Merit Badge prerequisites that are "Do all requirements."
 2. The Advancement Committee will consider special approvals if the Online Merit Badge Event point of contact can make a case for additional prerequisites in writing.
 3. If the prerequisite list does not include any listed, attach an explanation of how you are planning to accomplish the unlisted prerequisites at your event.
 4. If you plan to request offering a not normally permitted Merit Badge, attach an explanation of why this should be offered and how you plan to accomplish this Merit Badge.

Additional Notes:

1. Organizations planning online group instruction for only the members of their unit do not need to obtain Council approval, but must meet all other requirements of this policy.
2. A Trail to First Class session may be offered at an Online Merit Badge event. Only requirements appropriate to the time allowed for the event and the location are permitted. The Online Merit Badge application for the event must have attached an outline what requirements will be completed to gain approval. The flier for the event should notify Scouts that they must bring a written note from their Scoutmaster approving their attendance.
3. No Online Group Merit Badge Day event will be approved for days when a Council sponsored event is scheduled (Adventure Weekend, Scout-o-Rama, Scouting for Food, Camporee, etc.) The CIEC Advancement Committee reserves the right to decline approval for any event.
4. Scouts should dress in field uniform (shirt only is okay) for the event. The field uniform is determined by the Scout's unit (Venture Crew's specifically have a choice of uniform.) Shoe wear should be appropriate for the activities the Scout will be involved in. The point of this is not to add to the MB requirements, but to have the Scout in an appropriate attitude at the event.
5. When an online Merit Badge is offered that requires the counselor's prior approval of any part of it, then either a phone number or email of that counselor needs to be provided. It is up to each participant to individually contact the counselor prior to the Merit Badge Event to obtain that approval.

Online Group Merit Badge Day Flyer Recommended Items to Include:

1. Unit Type and Number
2. District
3. Web address (Location) of Online Merit Badge, Name and contact information of organizer.
4. Date of Online Merit Badge event
5. Check-in Time, Start Time, 1st Session Start Time, Lunch Time, 2nd Session Start Time, End Time, etc.
7. Last Date to Register
8. Registration Information
9. Material Fee if applicable
11. List of Merit Badges – include any prerequisites (no more than three merit badges may be offered)
12. Name of Point of Contact or Coordinator, E-mail
13. The statement: "Approved by the California Inland Empire Council Advancement Committee".