In the event unit leaders or other volunteers discover that any merit badge counselors are not following mandated procedures regarding the use of blue cards or working with the requirements as they are written, they should complete and submit to the council advancement committee the Reporting Merit Badge Counseling Concerns form, 11.0.0.0. Unit leaders should regularly review the policies and procedures related to the merit badge process with Scouts, parents, and leaders, and counsel them on proper methods as the need arises.

Though it has not been clearly stated in the past, units, districts, and local councils do not have the authority to implement a different system for merit badge approval and documentation. In any case, through the years, many councils have created new forms and approaches to the process, some including IT components. In an effort to gather and consider these potential best practices, councils are now asked to submit descriptions and copies of their blue card alternatives to the national Advancement Team.

7.0.0.3 The Scout, the Blue Card, and the Unit Leader

A few merit badges have certain restrictions, but otherwise any registered Boy Scout, Varsity Scout, or qualified Venturer or Sea Scout may work on any of them at any time, as long as he has had a discussion with his unit leader. That a discussion has been held is indicated by the unit leader’s signature on the Application for Merit Badge, No. 34124, commonly called the “blue card.” Although it is the unit leader’s responsibility to see that at least one merit badge counselor is entered from those approved and made available, the Scout may have one in mind with whom he would like to work. The unit leader and Scout should come to agreement as to who the counselor will be. Lacking agreement, the Scout must be allowed to work with the counselor of his choice, so long as the counselor is registered and has been approved by the council advancement committee. However, see “Counselor Approvals and Limitations,” 7.0.1.4, for circumstances when a unit leader may place limits on the number of merit badges that may be earned from one counselor.

The Scout may also want to take advantage of opportunities at merit badge fairs or midways, or at rock-climbing gyms or whitewater rafting trips that provide merit badge instruction. This is also acceptable, but the Scout must still discuss the merit badge with the unit leader and get a signed blue card. Should a Scout want to change counselors, he should once again speak with the unit leader to verify that the counselor is properly registered and approved. Whatever the source, all merit badge counselors must be registered and approved for the merit badges they counsel. See “Counselor Approvals and Limitations,” 7.0.1.4, and “Registration and Reregistration,” 7.0.1.5.

A unit leader should consider making more of the process than just providing a signature. The opportunity exists, then and there, to share in a young man’s life. Preliminary merit badge discussions can lead to conversations about talents and interests, goal setting, and the concept of “challenge by choice.” The benefits can be much like those of a well-done Scoutmaster conference.

The discussion a Scout is to have with the unit leader is meant to be a growth-oriented and positive conversation. The unit leader should discuss any concerns related to working on the merit badge and provide appropriate counseling. It is then the Scout’s decision whether or not to proceed with the merit badge. The process is intended to inform the Scout about what he may encounter along the way, and perhaps to give him suggestions on how the work might be approached. It also has the purpose of keeping the unit leader up to date with what the members of the unit are doing.

Because of the counseling opportunity involved, it is the unit leader’s responsibility to sign blue cards. In the role of giving leadership to the delivery of the troop program, a Scoutmaster, for example, has a better opportunity than other leaders to get to know the youth. This background with the Scouts allows a unit leader to add greater value in the discussion and counseling intended to take place with the signing of the card. However, in circumstances when this may be impractical—for example, in large units or when the unit leader may be absent—the unit leader may delegate authority to sign cards and conduct the discussions. This authority should be entrusted to a knowledgeable assistant unit leader.

7.0.1.0 About Merit Badge Counselors

7.0.1.1 Qualifications of Counselors

People serving as merit badge counselors, including those working at summer camp, must maintain registration with the Boy Scouts of America as merit badge counselors and be approved by the local council advancement committee for each of their badges. See “Counselor Approvals and Limitations,” 7.0.1.4.