

# Unit Elections Frequently Asked Questions

The definitive rules and procedures for unit elections are contained in the [Guide for Officers and Advisers](#). In case of any conflict or ambiguity between the [Guide to Inductions](#) or the [Guide to Unit Elections](#) and the [Guide for Officers and Advisers](#), always refer to the [Guide for Officers and Advisers](#) as the definitive document.

## 1. When does a Scout have to earn their Scouts BSA First Class rank, to become eligible for election?

A. The [Guide for Officers and Advisers](#) says:

... At the time of their election, youth must be under the age of 21, and hold one of the following ranks corresponding to the type of unit in which they are being considered for election: Scouts BSA First Class rank, the Venturing Discovery Award, or the Sea Scout Ordinary rank or higher...

To ensure that the Scout will be able to handle the challenges of the Ordeal weekend and to uphold the OA's standing as Scouting's national honor society, each candidate must have passed a board or bridge of review for the First Class rank, Venturing Discovery Award, or the Sea Scout Ordinary rank before the election is held. Any Scout who has passed their board or bridge of review meets this requirement, even if the award has not been formally presented, such as at a court of honor.

## 2. Can a Scout use the same camping nights towards the requirements of Camping merit badge and for the OA camping requirement?

A. Yes. While the Scouts BSA advancement program often prohibits one action or event from counting towards two different requirements, camping nights can be counted towards both Scouts BSA advancement and the OA camping requirement.

## 3. A Scout who recently joined my unit camped a lot in their previous unit. Should that camping be counted when deciding if

they can be listed on the election ballot for my unit's election?

A. Yes. All BSA camping done by a Scout in the program area for which they are being considered for election (see question 4 for exception) counts towards the camping portion of the membership qualifications, as long as the camping was within the last two years.

## 4. A Scout in my Scouts BSA troop is also registered in a Venturing crew or Sea Scout Ship. Can camping trips with the crew or ship count towards the camping requirement?

A. It is preferred that camping requirements be met as part of the unit in which the youth is being considered for election (i.e., troop, crew, or ship); however, extenuating circumstances may exist (e.g., in cases where a youth did not have an opportunity to meet the requirement with the unit), that make it appropriate for unit leaders to consider other BSA camping experiences (e.g., a Venturer counting camping nights completed with a troop or camping nights completed while serving as a staff member at a council camp or national high adventure base). In each case, the unit leader must satisfy themselves the spirit and intent of the requirement was met (i.e., it was indeed qualifying outdoor camping).

## 5. If a Scout goes to summer camp and a jamboree in the same summer, how do these count towards the camping requirement?

A. The [Guide for Officers and Advisers](#) says:

Have experienced 15 nights of Boy Scout camping while registered with a troop, crew or ship within the two years immediately prior to the election. **The 15 nights must include one, but no more than one, long-term camp consisting of at least five consecutive nights of overnight camping**, approved and under the auspices and standards of the Boy Scouts of America. **Only five nights of**

**the long-term camp may be credited toward the 15-night camping requirement**; the balance of the camping (10 nights) must be overnight, weekend, or other short-term camps of, at most, three nights each. Ship nights may be counted as camping for Sea Scouts.  
*[emphasis added]*

Only one long term camp can be used towards the camping requirement. For a Scout who attends summer camp and a jamboree in the same year, five nights of the time at summer camp or at the jamboree (but not both) can be used towards the camping requirement. Ten more nights of short-term camp would also be required to meet the camping requirement in order to reach the 15 nights requirement.

**6. Does the long term camp have to be at my council's camp?**

- A. Camping at a council's own camp(s) is not part of the national requirements for eligibility for election to the Order of the Arrow. Any "long-term camp ... approved and under the auspices and standards of the Boy Scouts of America" meets this portion of the camping requirement.

Councils and lodges should conduct elections in any unit that requests one, without regard to where the unit attends summer camp.

**7. Does the camping have to be with a Scout's unit?**

- A. Camping does not have to be with a Scout's unit. For example, participation in a seven day, six night National Youth Leadership Training course should be considered a "long-term camp" as would attendance at summer camp with another troop. (However only five nights of the long-term camp count towards the fifteen nights of camping requirement.)

**8. My unit attends summer camp for five days and four nights. Can that count towards the camping requirement?**

- A. The camping requirement for long-term camps is a minimum of five nights, so three nights of this could be counted as a short-term camp.

**9. What does "... under the auspices of the Boy Scouts of America" mean in the camping requirement?**

- A. It means: Camping conducted within the guidelines of the Boy Scouts of America, amongst other things, to conduct the program in accordance with the [Guide to Safe Scouting](#) and all youth protection guidelines, and, if water sports are conducted, using Safe Swim Defense and the buddy system, and all other policies in force not specifically listed here. Ultimately, the local council is the final arbiter of whether an encampment is in compliance and therefore under the auspices of the BSA.

**10. I went on several camping trips when I was registered as a Webelos den leader and before I registered as an assistant Scoutmaster. Can those trips count towards the OA camping requirement?**

- A. The Order of the Arrow's membership eligibility requirements focus on youth registered in Scouts BSA, Venturing, or Sea Scouts, and the camping requirement must be fulfilled through camping done while a Scout in one of those three programs. Because of this, time spent camping as a Cub Scout does not count towards OA eligibility. This makes sense when we consider another requirement, which is that election candidates hold the Scouts BSA First Class rank, the Venturing Discovery Award, or the Sea Scout Ordinary rank or higher, and work towards these rank or award requirements cannot begin until becoming a member of a Scouts BSA troop, Venturing crew, or Sea Scout ship.

Similarly, camping done by unit adults only counts towards OA membership when the adults are registered as Scouts BSA, Venturing, or Sea Scout leaders. Thus, camping done while registered as a

Cub Scout Webelos den leader does not count towards OA eligibility (unless the adult is also registered in a troop, crew or ship at the time).

**11. We have an adult assistant Scoutmaster who is two nights shy of the camping requirement. Youth elections are next week. Most likely two Scouts will be elected (one of them the assistant Scoutmaster's son). Five days after the youth election the assistant Scoutmaster will have met the camping requirement. Can the troop committee nominate the assistant Scoutmaster several days after the youth election?**

A. The *Guide for Officers and Advisers* says:

“Each year, upon holding a unit election for youth candidates that results in at least one youth candidate being elected, the unit committee may nominate adults to the lodge adult selection committee...”

In many units, the unit committee meets once or twice a month, so adult nominations may follow the youth election by as much as a few weeks. Adults must meet the eligibility requirements when the unit committee makes its decision on whom to nominate, not at the time of the youth election.

**12. Do youths have to be present for an election, or can they participate by phone or Skype or vote through an absentee ballot?**

A. All youths must be physically present to vote in a unit election. Voting by phone, Skype, absentee ballot, etc. is not permitted in unit elections.

**13. Do youths have to be present to be placed on the election ballot and be elected?**

A. No. All Scouts who meet the eligibility requirements should be included on the election ballot, even if some of these Scouts are not present when the election is being held.

**14. As a unit leader, how do I determine which youths are active and thus count for purposes of determining if a quorum is present for an election?**

A. The *Guide for Officers and Advisers* says:

**Registered active member.** In Scouts BSA troops, Venturing crews, and Sea Scout ships, every registered active member of the unit under age 21 at the time of election (including assistant Scoutmasters who are 18, 19 or 20 years old) is eligible to vote.

A Scout who carries a current national membership card and participates in at least some unit activities during the year is considered to be a registered active member of the unit. For example, a youth away at college who participates in some unit activities when home, such as a campout, camporee, or occasional unit meeting, should be considered a registered active member.

A youth who moves away or drops out of the unit because of other interests would not be counted in the registered active membership figure.

As an example, a Scout who hasn't participated in unit activities in several months and who cannot be reached to confirm that they have dropped out of the unit should not be counted as a member of the unit when deciding if at least 50 percent of the registered active unit membership is present.

**15. Can a unit conduct its own election?**

A. The *Guide for Officers and Advisers* says:

**Induction: Election to Ordeal**

2. The lodge, through the unit elections committee, should work with the unit leader in establishing the actual time and place to conduct the election. The OA should be represented by a two or three-member team from the lodge or chapter unit elections committee. All elections

teams must be trained and in proper uniform during the election.

The lodge is responsible for making sure that elections teams are properly trained, so it's important that units not conduct their own elections.

**16. What's the status in the OA of assistant Scoutmasters who are under age 21?**

A. Young adults ages 18 through 20 are considered youth members of the Order of the Arrow. Because of this, assistant scoutmasters who are 18, 19 or 20 years old and who meet the youth eligibility requirements should be included on election ballots whenever an election is held in a troop, and these young adults should be allowed to participate in the election in the same manner as youth members under age 18. Once inducted, these young adults may participate fully in the Order of the Arrow as youth members, until their 21st birthday. Similarly, Sea Scouts and Venturing crew members ages 18 through 20 are considered youth members for the purposes of OA elections.

**17. Can a unit use pre-printed ballots in an election?**

A. Yes. However, care must be taken to ensure that all candidates' names appear on the ballot. Excluding a candidate's name and having it "written in" during the election is inappropriate since this may prevent a fair opportunity for this candidate to be elected. If it is discovered that an eligible candidate's name is missing from a preprinted ballot, blank ballots should be used instead.

**18. Can "All of the above" be included as a choice on a pre-printed ballot?**

A. Yes. A voter may list on their ballot any combination of names, including all eligible candidates who they believe are worthy to become members of the Order of the Arrow so having an "all of the above" box on a pre-printed ballot is appropriate. Here is a sample:

Please place a check next to the name of each candidate who you believe is worthy to become a member of the Order of the Arrow.

- Jeff Scout
- José Star
- Dhairya Eagle
- All of the above

If you feel that no one is worthy, turn in an unmarked ballot.

If you do not know the candidates well enough to vote wisely you may abstain by not turning in a ballot at all. This will not affect the final result.

**19. Can a unit leader or council add requirements to the national OA requirements for election?**

A. No, a scoutmaster, crew advisor, or skipper (or unit committee, district, council, chapter or lodge) has no authority to change the requirements for election to the Order of the Arrow, just as they have no authority to change the Eagle Scout or other rank requirements. However, a unit leader does have the responsibility to certify that the unit's Scouts have met the national eligibility requirements before submitting their names for the ballot for the unit's election.

**20. What is the unit leader's role in a unit election?**

A. The [Guide for Officers and Advisers](#) says:

**Membership Requirements**

**Unit leader approval.** To become eligible for election, a Scout must be registered with the Boy Scouts of America and have the approval of their unit leader immediately prior to the election. The unit leader must certify their Scout spirit (*i.e.*, their adherence to the Scout Oath and Law.

and active participation in unit activities). The unit leader must also certify that the nominee meets all specified requirements at the time of this annual election.

#### **Induction: Election to Ordeal.**

4. The unit leader provides a list of all registered active members of the unit who meet all eligibility requirements, including attitude and participation.

The unit leader holds the responsibility of certifying a Scout's eligibility before placement on an Order of the Arrow election ballot. The unit leader's certification is as of the date of the election, and any Scout who meets the camping and other requirements as of that date should be listed on the election ballot. This approval is not one of preferential treatment or specific selection for membership rooted in the unit leader's own vision, but one of qualifying a candidate for eligibility. By including a Scout's name on the list of those whose names should appear on an election ballot, the unit leader certifies that:

- The Scout is a currently registered active member of the unit (troop, crew, or ship)
- The Scout exhibits Scout spirit by living in accordance with the Scout Oath and Law
- The Scout fulfills all other Order of the Arrow membership requirements.

Clearly, the unit leader's approval is earned through merit in Scouting. The unit leader has two roles with the OA: an administrative certification that the objective requirements are met and a more judgment-oriented one with the Scout spirit requirement that the Scout, in their opinion, has been a "good Scout" and lives up to the obligations taken in the Scout Oath and Scout Law. This requirement helps to uphold the high standard that OA membership warrants.

#### **21. Can a unit leader adjust the results of the youth election results before the results are announced?**

- A. After the youths have voted, the unit leader cannot adjust the results of the election. The *Guide for Officers and Advisers* says that lodge rules must include this standard rule:

**Rule III.A.** The requirements for membership in this lodge are as stated in the current printing of the *Order of the Arrow Handbook* and the *Order of the Arrow Guide for Officers and Advisers*.

The "Induction: Election to Ordeal" section of the *Guide for Officers and Advisers*, details the procedure to be used for elections. Voting by unit leaders or adjusting the results of the youth votes is not part of the procedure and therefore is not allowed.

However, the unit leader is not an ineffective actor with regard to OA unit elections. Here is what one successful, long-term unit leader did. He reports that he was never disappointed with the wisdom of the voters:

I made the OA unit election a yearlong process of encouraging the Scouts in the unit to participate in the OA's activities, and always made sure a youth member (the OA Unit Representative) got up and explained what the event was being held, and ensured that our unit youth leaders had a copy of the chapter and lodge calendar to be sure that they did not schedule any events in conflict with the published OA calendar. This calendar exercise alone put the OA events front and center in the minds of the unit youth leaders once a month.

Beyond talking about the OA and their events, I would follow up the Unit Rep's presentation by telling the unit "why" the OA did these things. Often, I would include discussions of service and the concept of servant leadership in my Scoutmaster minutes.

Then, six weeks before the election, as soon as our youths scheduled the chapter elections team to come to the meeting, I would begin a series of

short comments in each meeting or campout describing the OA and what it was about. It went like this:

**Six weeks out:** Bring in a copy of James Fennimore Cooper's book, *The Last of the Mohicans* and explain that the OA had roots in great American literature. See what they know about it.

**Five weeks out:** Show a video I compiled on *The Last of the Mohicans* movie... and take questions about the Delaware Tribe... Get out a map of the Great Northeast and show the range of the Delaware.

**Four weeks out:** Introduce the concept of service. Bring in my 1914 handbook and show the Scouts the chapter on chivalry and let them see the original drawing of a Scout helping an old lady cross the street.

**Three weeks out:** Remind them of their slogan, to do a good turn daily, and see if any Scouts have examples of ones they might share with the group. Ask them to be sure to do this in the coming week.

**Two weeks out:** Talk about the OA and ask three or four Scouts who are members to speak for two to three minutes each about what to look for in a member, drawing on the above. Ask the Scouts to give you specific examples of acts of kindness that have been performed by the unit members. Include as many Scouts in this as you can... you can suggest those squeamish or awkward Scouts who you believe may be overlooked, but you feel are worthy. Scouts will know if you are honest in this... or campaigning, so just speak from your heart as the Scouts do most of the talking about their fellows.

**One week out:** Specifically talk with them about the ballot, post the draft ballot so all can see, and be sure they

come see the advancement committee member present, if we do not show them as qualified, when they think they may be. Address the "popularity contest" aspect of the election as something to avoid, and call on their higher angels to identify each person who lives the Scout Oath and Law in the meeting.

**Election night:** Introduce the elections team and reiterate the purpose of the OA. Explain that the OA is the only organization in Scouting where the non-members choose the members, and reinforce that I have authorized this ballot because I believe these Scouts are qualified and worthy of consideration.

Of course, every situation is different, but over the years, our unit's Scouts chose a wide range of Scouts, but I was never disappointed. I made it a year round education process, so never was tempted to have to adjust the will of the Scouts. I spent my time adjusting their thinking to what would serve the unit and the OA best. It worked.

**22. How do you keep the elections from being a popularity contest? Some Scouts who meet the requirements and definitely have the qualities of a true Scout are not elected. They meet the qualifications year after year. Even the other Scouts are surprised certain Scouts are never elected.**

- A. The unit elections chair from the local lodge or chapter might be invited to come and talk to the Scouts about the Order of the Arrow, rather than relying solely on the OA Elections video. Nationally, many of our most successful chapters and lodges have noticed that this practice, especially when the unit leader is also invited to comment, makes those in the unit recognize the founding ideals of the OA and helps to take away consideration of other factors.

In May 2008 the Order of the Arrow distributed an Operations Update which included a Unit Elections section on page 3. Its recommendations have been used effectively in a number of units around the country. Here is a quote from the Operations Update to further address the question:

Electing candidates from medium to large size units can be a challenge. The basic problem is that many Scouts, especially the older ones, don't really know the younger Scouts and are reluctant to vote for them. This can be a significant problem especially with youths who are quiet and introverted.

Noticing their low election results, a number of unit leaders have developed a procedure to directly address this situation. It has produced significant improvements in the election results in these units. Some unit leaders announce the youth's rank/award, number of nights of camping, and service hours as the names are read. Others include similar information on the ballot of names. Another technique is to print the individual Scouting record of each candidate, listing their name, school grade, rank/award, number of merit badges (if applicable), summer camp years, camping nights, leadership positions held, and special awards or events attended. Regardless of the procedure used, the purpose of this is to help the unit members know something about the candidates before they vote. It works and produces much better election results.

The scoutmaster, crew advisor, or skipper still decides the names to appear on the ballot, listing only those who have demonstrated Scout spirit and who meet the OA eligibility requirements. A Scout whose name is being withheld because of Scout spirit needs to be told why in advance. Also, some Scouts may not be interested in becoming OA members. The unit

leader should have a conversation with those youth who are not interested in becoming an OA member to understand the reasoning behind that decision. The unit leader should offer the eligible candidates the opportunity to "opt out" of being on the annual ballot prior to its printing.

This procedure has been tried and tested. It produces 50% to 100% better election results and is worthy of your consideration.

**23. Can you help me better understand the number of unit adults who can be nominated when a unit conducts an election?**

A. The *Guide for Officers and Advisers* says:

Each year, upon holding a unit election for youth candidates that results in at least one youth candidate being elected, the unit committee may nominate adults to the lodge adult selection committee, composed of the lodge adviser, the chair of the council committee on which the lodge adviser serves, and the lodge staff adviser. The number of adults nominated can be no more than one-third of the number of youth candidates elected, rounded up where the number of youth candidates is not a multiple of three. In addition to the one-third limit, the unit committee may nominate the currently serving unit leader (but not assistant leaders), as long as they have served as unit leader for at least the previous 12 months.

So, as long as the adults meet the camping and other requirements, this chart can be used:

| No. of Youths Elected | Maximum No. of Adults That Can be Nominated |
|-----------------------|---|
| 0                     | 0   |
| 1                     | 1 + unit leader                             |
| 2                     | 1 + unit leader                             |
| 3                     | 1 + unit leader                             |
| 4                     | 2 + unit leader                             |
| 5                     | 2 + unit leader                             |
| 6                     | 2 + unit leader                             |
| 7                     | 3 + unit leader                             |
| 8                     | 3 + unit leader                             |
| 9                     | 3 + unit leader                             |
| 10                    | 4 + unit leader                             |
| 11                    | 4 + unit leader                             |
| 12                    | 4 + unit leader                             |
| And so forth          |   |

**24. What is the role of the unit leader (scoutmaster, crew advisor, or skipper) and the unit committee chair in signing the adult nomination form? Do they decide which adults get nominated or does the unit committee make the decision?**

A. The *Guide for Officers and Advisers* says:

Each year, upon holding a unit election for youth candidates that results in at least one youth candidate being elected, the unit committee may nominate adults to the lodge adult selection committee, composed of the lodge adviser, the chair of the council committee on which the lodge adviser serves and the lodge staff adviser.

The unit committee decides which adults are nominated, and the unit leader and unit committee chair sign on behalf of the committee and its decision.

**25. What should our lodge do if a unit leader mistakenly certifies a Scout as eligible for election when they are not eligible and that Scout is subsequently called out?**

A. If a Scout was incorrectly elected, but not called out, do not add them to the list of those to be called out. Have the unit leader counsel the Scout and explain to

them that a mistake was made. Encourage the Scout to remain involved and committed so that they may appear on next year's ballot.

If a Scout was incorrectly called out but not inducted, do not induct them, and, again, have that unit leader conference.

If a Scout was incorrectly inducted, the Scout should be allowed to retain membership in the Order of the Arrow. The Scout should be counseled about the circumstances with guidance from their unit leader and the chapter or lodge adviser so that they can help the Scout mature, participate, and be successful in the Order of the Arrow.

26. I'm a chapter adviser. A chapter elections team recently conducted an election for a unit in my chapter and three Scouts were elected. The day after the election, the unit leader contacted me to ask for a supplemental election because he accidentally left some Scouts off the list of those eligible for election. Can the chapter arrange for another election?

A. Election policy is set by the national OA committee to ensure uniformity across the nation. One longstanding policy is that a unit may have only one election per year. While it's regrettable that the unit leader did not provide a complete list of eligible Scouts for the election that was held, national policy does not permit an additional election to be held to address the issue.