

Understanding the Eagle Scout Board of Review

**By Terry Lawson, Director
Advancement/National Eagle Scout Association**

December, 2003

The last major step for an Eagle Scout candidate is the all-important Eagle Scout board of review. Though a Scout may complete the 21 merit badges, the leadership service project, his tenure, all other requirements, and the Scoutmaster conference, he must pass the Eagle Scout board of review to receive the award.

Board Member Requirements

The council determines which venue will be used to conduct the board of review. The options are to hold it at the unit, district, or council level. If it is held at the unit level, at least one district or council advancement committee representative must be a member of that Eagle Scout board of review. The board of review must have a minimum of three and a maximum of six members, and all members must be at least 21 years old. It is important to have quality individuals serving on the board of review to ensure the Scout has a quality experience with his Eagle board. The members do not have to be registered Scouters, but they must have an understanding of the importance and purpose of the Eagle Scout board of review.

The Role of References

The Eagle candidate completes an Eagle rank application that is then verified by the council prior to conducting the board of review. This ensures that all requirements have been met before the review takes place. The application requires six references to be listed, with only the "employer" reference allowed to be omitted if the candidate has no employer. The religious reference may be signed by a parent if the Scout does not belong to an organized religion. The council is responsible for checking the references. Councils determine how the references will be contacted and may delegate this task to their districts. If the council or district chooses to ask for letters from the references, it is not the responsibility of the candidate to secure them. Any letters of reference should be forwarded to the council, district, or board of review committee directly. The candidate should never see these letters—they should be filed or destroyed if the Eagle rank is approved. If the Eagle rank is denied, any reference letters should be filed until a final disposition of the matter is reached. Failure to receive a reference letter is not justification for failing a board of review. If letters are required or not received, the candidate should be allowed to substitute references.

The 18th Birthday Requirement

All requirements for the Eagle Scout rank must be completed prior to the Scout's 18th birthday or by the expiration date of any extension granted by the National Council. This deadline applies also to the Scoutmaster conference. Though all the requirements must be met before the 18th birthday, the board of review may be conducted after that date. Boards held within 90 days of a Scout's 18th birthday are allowed unquestioned. Boards held 90 to 180 days after the 18th birthday require a statement explaining the reason for the delay. This statement must be attached to the Eagle Scout Rank Application when submitted to the National Council. Boards held more than 180 days after the 18th birthday require approval from the National Council prior to being conducted.

The Board's Purpose

Once a boy has completed all the requirements for Eagle rank, he is entitled to a board of review. Both the Scoutmaster and the troop committee chair should sign the application. If one or both refuse to sign the application, the Scout is still entitled to a board of review. However, this circumstance may be considered by the board of review, and could affect the outcome.

The board of review is not an examination, and the board members should not "retest" the candidate. Rather, the board should attempt to determine the Scout's attitude and his acceptance of Scouting's ideals. The review should take about 30 minutes. Parents, relatives, assistant Scoutmasters, and individuals representing the group for which the Eagle service project was performed should not be at the board. The unit leader may be present, but does not participate in the board except to clarify a point in question.

Determine Fair Questions

There is no standard set of questions that an Eagle candidate should be asked. However, the board should be assured of the candidate's participation in the program. A question such as, "Do you subscribe to the Boy Scouts of America's Declaration of Religious Principle?" is fair to ask because a belief in God is necessary to be a Scout. But because the way a boy practices his religion or worships his God is a personal matter, it is not acceptable to ask such questions as, "How do you worship God?" or "How do you fulfill your religious obligations?" Similarly, questions such as, "Are you under any scrutiny from any law enforcement agency, your school, or any other such entity that the board may be unaware of?" are fair in helping the board ascertain the character of a questionable candidate.

Clarifying the Active Member Requirement

The requirement to "Be active in your troop and patrol for six months as a Life Scout" means exactly that. If a Scout earns Life rank at the age of 15 and becomes inactive for a period of time, but then comes back to finish his Eagle rank, he only has to be active in the troop for a total of six months. Another Eagle requirement calls for him to serve as a Life Scout in a leadership position for six months. These requirements can be very challenging for Scouts who participate in other activities. Unit leaders should talk with Scouts who are so challenged, and mutually come to agreement on their understanding of the term "active" long before it becomes an issue for the Eagle candidate. Being active does not necessarily mean attending all meetings and outings—there are other things Scouts can do to actively support the troop.

After the Interview

After the board interviews the Eagle candidate, the Scout and his unit leader should leave the room while the board deliberates. All boards require a unanimous decision. If the vote is for approval, then the Scout should be congratulated and informed that it is not final until approved by the National Council. If the Scout is denied his Eagle rank, he should be told why he was denied and informed of the appeal process available to him. The Scout and his leader should not be aware of who voted negatively either by results of the vote or by name.

With proper planning and a properly trained board of review committee, the board of review can be a very positive experience for the Eagle candidate.