

Frequently Asked Questions

Scouts BSA Troop 56 Cambridge

(known formerly as Scouting Collective 56 or Troop/Crew 56)

Organization

What is Scouts BSA?

Scouts BSA (formerly “Boy Scouts”) is a youth-led, co-ed program for youth ages 11 to 18 that teaches outdoor skills, fosters personal development and community engagement, and develops teamwork and leadership skills.

What is Troop 56?

Troop 56 is officially two Scouts BSA troops: one for boys and one for girls. Each troop has its own Scoutmaster, but all other adult volunteers are dual-registered, serving the same position in each troop. For practical purposes the two troops work as a single troop.

What was Scouting Collective 56 or Troop/Crew 56?

Scouts BSA officially became a co-ed program in 2019, but Troop 56 has welcomed all youth since 2004. In order to include girls prior to 2019, Troop 56 programming was offered through a Venturing Crew and an Explorer Post, BSA programs that are historically co-ed. These programs along with the “Boy Scout” troop served to bring Scouting to all youth ages 11 to 21 and were collectively referred to as Troop/Crew 56 or Scouting Collective 56.

What is a Venturing Crew and what is Crew 56?

Venturing is a co-ed BSA program for youth ages 14 to 21 who come together in a “crew” (rather than a “troop”). Prior to 2019, Crew 56 ran in conjunction with Troop 56 to provide a co-ed program. Crew 56 still operates in order to welcome youth up to the age of 21 who wish to continue with official youth Scouting opportunities, such as capstone projects. Additionally, all Troop 56 youth ages 14 and older are registered in Crew 56 for reasons relating to attending national programs as a co-ed unit.

Is there a program for youth younger than 11?

Scouts BSA offers Cub Scouting for youth in kindergarten through grade 5. Cub Scouts operate in “packs” (instead of “troops”). Pack 56 is affiliated with Troop 56.

What is a Chartering Organization?

Any Scouting unit (a troop, crew, or pack) is “chartered” by a hosting organization such as a school, church, or other community organization. The chartering organization provides meeting space and may set membership policies for the unit. Troop 56 is chartered by St. James’s Church in Cambridge. The Charter Organization representative coordinates between the church and the troop.

What does it mean that Troop 56 is an “Inclusion Unit”?

Troop 56 welcomes Scouts, families, and volunteers of all of sexual orientations, gender identities, and faith traditions — including no formal faith tradition.

What does it mean that Scouting is “youth led”?

Empowering youth to be leaders is the core of Scouting. Although adult leaders guide and mentor the youth, drive on trips, handle finances and legal matters, and ensure safe and appropriate practices, Scouts BSA — including Troop 56 — is a youth-directed program. The youth serve in troop leadership positions, run the meetings, choose activities, lead trips, pack up group gear, shop for groceries, do their own cooking and dishwashing, etc.

How are the youth organized?

Twice a year, the Troop 56 Scouts elect an executive called a Senior Patrol Leader (SPL) who serves as primary youth leader for Troop 56. For practical purposes, Scouts are sub-grouped into “patrols” of 4-8 youth, and each patrol elects a Patrol Leader. The Patrol Leaders report to the Senior Patrol Leader. There

are additional youth leadership positions such as Scribe (like a secretary), Quartermaster (equipment manager), and Troop Guide (an experienced Scout who teaches Scout skills to newer Scouts). The Patrol Leader Council (PLC) is a youth executive board comprised of the SPL, the ASPL, the Patrol Leaders, and the Troop Guide that meets monthly to plan the upcoming portion of the Troop 56 program.

How are the adults organized?

The adults who are registered as adult volunteers are split into two groups: (1) the Scoutmasters plus Assistant Scoutmasters and (2) the Troop Committee. The Scoutmasters and Assistant Scoutmasters directly support youth programming by helping the youth with the meetings, outdoor trips, and other planned activities. The Troop Committee, headed by the Committee Chair, is the governing body of the troop and is responsible for conducting the business of the troop, for setting policy, and (secondarily) for helping deliver the Scouting program. The Troop 56 Committee meets monthly, with the meeting time arranged by the Committee Chair. All Scout parents are welcome to attend meetings of the Troop Committee, and parents all are encouraged to register with the BSA and become an official committee member. Registered committee members, but not Scoutmasters, may vote on policy decisions. Committee members may hold a committee specific position such as Treasurer, Secretary, Equipment Manager, Registrar, Fundraising Coordinator, etc.

Are there any visual aids or other documents to help understand organizational structures?

Yes. See the additional documents linked below.

Meetings, Outdoor Trips, Service Requirements, Program Cost, and Fundraising

How do troop/crew meetings work?

Meetings are Tuesdays nights from 7:00 to approximately 8:15 pm from September to June (except school holidays and snow days, following the Cambridge Public School calendar). The SPL is responsible for emailing meeting agendas in advance. Occasionally, optional merit badge classes will meet prior to the regular meeting. Weekly meetings are a time to plan for upcoming weekend trips, practice skills, and discuss upcoming fundraisers, service opportunities, etc. Prior to the close of each meeting, there is an opportunity for adults to make announcements about trips, fundraising, advancement opportunities, etc.

Historically, meetings are held at St. James's Church, but during the pandemic, meetings were on Zoom. Also during the pandemic, St. James's pushed ahead with a significant project to reconstruct the church meeting spaces. As soon as construction is completed, weekly meetings will resume at the church. Until then meetings may continue via Zoom or meet elsewhere; the email from the SPL will advise.

What are the monthly outdoor trips?

From September to June, Troop 56 offers at least one outdoor-based weekend activity per month. Examples of monthly trips include camping, backpacking, canoeing, snow shoeing, skiing, white water rafting, conservation projects, and outdoor first aid courses. Most trips run Friday afternoon through Sunday mid-day; the December trip is typically a one-day on a Saturday. Some of the monthly trips, particularly in the spring, are required preparation for those attending the summer high adventure trip.

How do monthly trips operate?

Each trip has a youth leader and two adult leaders (one male, one female). The youth leader announces the trip plans, develops and distributes the packing list, records sign-ups, collects permission slips, oversees the menu planning, creates the duty roster, ensures some youth shop for groceries and that other youth pack up necessary group gear, and makes carpool assignments. Trip departure time and meeting place in Cambridge are emailed by the youth trip leader. While each trip has two adult trip leaders, additional adults are asked to participate as drivers and trip helpers. Adults who attend trips are typically charged a relatively small fee per trip that gets charged retrospectively by the treasurer. Adults function as their own "patrol" on trips, working together to plan and cook their own meals.

What is a "pack check"?

For some trips, including backpacking, canoe camping, and cold-weather camping, Scouts will be required to bring their pack contents to a "pack check" at a meeting before the trip. The youth trip leader will read off all the items on the packing list and note whether each Scout has each item. Trip leaders will advise Scouts who need help procuring or borrowing items to ensure that each Scout has the necessary

gear and equipment to participate safely.

Are there ever any prerequisites for a trip?

Some trips do require pre-trip training or testing. For example, Scouts going on a canoe trip must pass a BSA swim test, and Scouts going on a summer high adventure trip must complete a Wilderness First Aid course.

How is the trip calendar determined?

In the spring each year, with the help of an adult who serves as the Activities Coordinator, the youth select the trips for the next Scouting year. The youth present the trip selections to the Troop Committee, and once the Committee approves the choices and sets the yearly dues, and the Activities Coordinator finalizes the activity calendar before September, although dates are sometimes subject to change.

What summer activities are available?

Most years, Troop 56 attends one week of summer camp as a group. Scouts who are unable to attend with the troop or who want to attend additional weeks, may attend camp as a “provisional” camper with other such campers from other troops. Other individual camp opportunities that youth register for include council-level and national-level leadership courses and themed summer camp weeks such as Eagle Week (a week of camp focused on Eagle-required merit badges). Most years, Troop 56 plans for an extensive summer high adventure trip for older youth, such as a 2-week trip to Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico (for ages 14+ or entering 9th grade) or an 11-day canoe trip in Maine (for ages 13+ or entering 8th grade).

How do adults contribute?

Troop 56 expects that at least one adult from a Scout’s family be an active participant. Troop 56 strongly encourages each family to help with carpooling for the weekend trips. Adults are encouraged to register with Scouts BSA and hold an official leadership position. Adults are needed to help with fundraising, managing gear, registration paperwork, medical forms collection, merit badge counselors, and more. Training opportunities are available for adults on the my.scouting.org website, and in-person through Troop 56 or council- or national-level courses. In addition to current Scout parents, Troop 56 has benefitted from the continued participation of adults whose children have aged out of the troop, enabling both youth and newer adults to benefit from their skills and experience, including outdoor skills, knowledge of organizational practices, and advice regarding practices that have (and have not) worked well in the past.

What does the program cost?

In Troop 56, all Scouts pay a yearly activity fee. A typical yearly fee is \$425–\$450 and is due in two installments (typically in September & January). This fee covers the cost of participating in all regular weekend trips, but not summer camp or other summer trips. The fee is due whether the Scout goes on one trip, a few trips, or all trips. The fee also covers handbooks and awards. There are no refunds.

How do youth & parents pay these costs? What are the fundraising requirements?

Scouts are expected to earn at least half the yearly activity fee for themselves. Parents may pay the other half or encourage their Scout(s) to contribute more. Troop 56 sponsors at least two youth-selected fundraisers each year to allow Scouts the opportunity to earn their portion of the fees. Typically, there is a tree & wreath sale in November for the December holidays, and recently, the spring fundraiser has been a selling of garbage bags. Particularly ambitious sellers in the past have earned enough to cover the whole year’s dues. Scouts who earn money from babysitting, pet sitting, yard work, etc. also may contribute those earnings to their activity fee.

Is there any other funding assistance?

Special activities such as summer camp, youth and adult leadership courses, Wilderness First Aid training, and summer high adventure trips are not covered by the yearly activity fee, but costs of these activities are often partially or fully funded by a trust fund for Cambridge-based Scouts, to which Troop 56 treasurer submits funding requests. Since funding from the trust fund is not guaranteed, fees for the special activities may be due up-front and later reimbursed.

What are the service requirements?

In return for having a place to meet and store gear, Troop 56 Scouts are required to perform volunteer

service for St. James's Church of approximately 4 hours per Scouting year. Typical service opportunities are volunteering with the church-run food pantry, helping with Sunday coffee hours, and pitching in on clean-up days. Adult help is also required for some of these volunteer events. Opportunities and sign-ups for these opportunities are managed by the Chartering Organization Representative and an associated youth leader.

In addition to the required service to the Chartering Organization, Scouts are required to complete set amounts of service hours to complete rank advancements (see below). These service hours may be met by helping with Eagle Scout service projects and other service opportunities that may arise. Additionally, the yearly trip calendar generally includes one trip focused on helping with a conservation project.

How does my child join?

Youth who are interested should attend one or more weekly meetings and learn more about the program. To officially join (and attend trips), a prospective Scout must complete a registration form, provide a BSA medical form, and pay the activity fee (typically prorated if the Scout joins mid-year based on when the Scout officially joins).

Communications

How do communications work?

Meeting reminders and agendas for youth meetings plus necessary follow-up information after a meeting are to be sent to the Scouts and parents via email from the SPL. Trip reminders, packing lists, and updates are to be sent to the Scouts and parents via email by the youth trip leader.

Each week, near the end of the meeting, the SPL will invite adults to make announcements to the group such as trips reminders, service requirements, fundraising events, merit badge opportunities, etc.

The opportunity to lead (and to sometimes make mistakes in leadership and communication) is an essential part of the youth learning that occurs in the Scouting program. Scouts are encouraged to ask questions at the meetings and to take notes to refer to later and in order to share important information with parents. Any Scout who has a question — either during a meeting, on a trip, in response to an email, or because an email has not been sent — should ask for clarification from a youth leader, such as the Scout's Patrol Leader, the SPL, or the youth trip leader.

Parents will receive the same email notifications that are sent to Scouts, and they may choose to listen in during a meeting — especially during the announcements period at the end of the meeting.

For the monthly meeting of the Troop Committee, reminders and agendas are emailed from the Committee Chair to the parents and registered adult leaders.

For the monthly trips, an adult trip leader will communicate estimated return times or any other important information to a designated adult from the troop who is not on the trip. That designated adult will then relay any information to the families of the participating Scouts. In this way, families can make plans to pick up returning Scouts, so that Scouts do not need to call home with updates.

Much of the program and yearly information can be found on the [Troop 56 website](#). Information there includes policy statements, permission slips and many other forms, a calendar of events, and more.

Advancement & Merit Badges

What are Scout ranks?

In Scouts BSA, ranks are levels of competency and accomplishments. The ranks fall into two groups, and each rank requires completing a set of skills and tasks as outlined in the Scouts BSA handbook:

- Scout, Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class ranks:

The skills for Scout, Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class include improving physical fitness, learning basic first aid, flag etiquette, and personal management, assisting with a service project, and

acquiring basic outdoor skills. Scouts BSA believes that Scouts will be most engaged and successful if Scouts earn these ranks within a year after joining, but every Scout should move at his or her own pace.

- **Star, Life, and Eagle Scout ranks:**

For advanced ranks of Star, Life, and Eagle, the focus is on earning merit badges, completing more extensive service projects, and developing leadership. Eagle Scout is the highest rank in Scouts BSA, and the centerpiece of Eagle rank advancement is the Eagle Project, which requires a Scout to propose, organize, and lead a service project.

How does advancement work?

Rank advancement is entirely self-paced and dependent on a Scout's own interest and desire. Advancement depends on acquiring an objective set of skills, not on popularity or being better than others. Requirements can accommodate a Scout's abilities and disabilities. Awarding a rank recognizes the hard work an individual has put in to achieving a goal or mastering a skill.

In Troop 56, each registered youth is given a Scouts BSA Handbook, which serves as a resource guide and place to record advancement achievements. All youth are encouraged to complete the Scout, Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class requirements within a year of joining as a way to master the basic outdoor skills of Scouting and to lay the groundwork for leadership development. To complete a rank, the Scout must complete all tasks and have a youth leader or adult leader (but not a Scout's own parent) sign off on the accomplishment. At each level, the final steps for completing a rank are (1) complete a Scoutmaster conference, so the Scoutmaster can verify that the candidate has met the specified requirements for the rank, and (2) complete a Board of Review, which is a meeting with three committee members who ensure that Troop 56 is providing a satisfactory program. Scouts are responsible to request their own Scoutmaster Conference and Board of Review, and a Scouts should wear a uniform shirt to the Scoutmaster Conference and Board of Review.

How is rank advancement acknowledged?

Rank advancement is considered earned on the day of completing all requirements, but advancement is formally acknowledged at an award ceremony called a Court of Honor (see below). A "rank patch" is awarded and should be worn on the left pocket of the uniform shirt.

What are merit badges?

Earning merit badges allows Scouts to explore many fields, round out skills, and perhaps discover a lifelong interest or rewarding career. Merit badges can be earned at any rank. There are over 100 merit badges from archery and aviation to wilderness survival and woodwork. Some merit badges are "Eagle required," meaning that in order to achieve the rank of Eagle Scout, those badges must be earned along with additional "elective" merit badges. Merit badges are awarded at a Court of Honor.

How, when, and where do Scouts earn merit badges?

Merit badges are earned by working with an expert who is registered with the BSA as a merit badge counselor. The merit badge counselor ensures that the Scout accomplishes the tasks required for the given merit badge. Verification of completing skills is tracked on a document called a "blue card." Historically, a blue card was, indeed, a small, blue card. Today, fillable PDF blue cards are also available (link available on Troop 56 website under the Forms & Policies tab). BSA merit badge handbooks are available for every merit badge subject. These handbooks list the merit badge requirements and serve as an informational resource for the given subject. Troop 56 has some merit badge handbooks to loan, and the handbooks can also be purchased at a Scout Shop. Scouts can earn merit badges at summer camp, at the council's "Merit Badge University" each spring (and similar programs at other councils), and with the troop via "in house" merit badge classes. Scouts may also pursue merit badge work individually by consulting with the Scoutmaster or the troop's Advancement Chair to identify a merit badge counselor whom the Scout can contact to ask about availability to work with the Scout.

What is a Court of Honor?

A Court of Honor is an award ceremony for acknowledging Scouts who have earned rank advancement or merit badges, have been elected to leadership positions, and to celebrate other Scout and troop achievements. Troop 56 generally holds three Courts of Honor each year, and the ceremonies are generally preceded by a potluck dinner. All family members are welcome to attend the potluck and the ceremony in order to foster community and celebrate Scout achievements.

Uniforms, Clothing, Gear

What are the uniform requirements?

Troop 56 expects Scouts to obtain a Scout (tan) or Venturing (green) shirt with the proper insignia (council strip, unit numbers, World Scouting insignia). Altogether, the shirt and insignia are sometimes referred to as a “class A” outfit. This is worn to meetings, Courts of Honor, and some other events (such as arrival and other times at summer camp). Eventually, a Scout will need a merit badge sash and may be interested in acquiring additional “official” uniform pieces such as Scout uniform pants, socks, and belt. Troop 56 does not have a Troop-branded uniform neckerchief and does not require a neckerchief to be worn at meetings.

What hiking and camping gear is required?

Scouts will need to have proper clothing for outdoor activities (see next question) and some basic camping equipment including a sleeping bag, insulating pad, mess kit, and water bottles. On backpacking trips, Scouts will need a backpack and hiking boots.

What is “proper” outdoor clothing?

Hiking clothes should be non-cotton (polypropylene, nylon, wool, etc.) and should include shorts, pants, socks, long and short-sleeve shirts. A Scout should also have a rain jacket and rain pants. And for cold weather trips, a Scout will need non-cotton thermal underwear. Cotton is not an approved material for outdoor activities because when wet, it conducts heat away from the body.

What is a Troop 56 Activity Shirt?

In Scouting, an “activity shirt” (also sometimes referred to as a “class B”) is a troop-branded or event-branded shirt to be worn for troop and Scouting activities such as hiking trips, some service days, and other times when a Scout identity is useful but a full uniform is not needed. The Troop 56 activity shirt is blue, short-sleeved, nylon t-shirt, and each Scout is provided with one activity shirt at no cost. Families and Scouts may order additional activity shirts and other Troop 56 branded items at cost.

Where can Scouts and families purchase BSA uniforms and Scout gear?

- **Woburn Scout Shop** : 2R Tower Office Park, Woburn, 781-937-4282
- **New England Base Camp Shop**: 411 Unquity Road, Milton, 617-361-0315
- **Online**: <https://www.scoutshop.org/>

Troop 56 hopes that the costs of uniforms and gear do not hold anyone back from participation. There are opportunities for families to donate gently used items to a cache for others to draw from. Check with a Scoutmaster or the Committee Chair.

Troop 56 also has access to clothing and gear from the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC). As a participant in the AMC’s Youth Opportunities Program (YOP), the troop can borrow basic outdoor clothing and equipment such as winter clothing and sleeping bags as well as specialized equipment such as snowshoes and cross-country skis.

Safety, Medical Forms, Prescription Medicines, Behavior, Electronics

What are the safety policies?

Troop 56 adheres the BSA publication [Guide to Safe Scouting](#) (G2SS), which comprehensively describes all BSA safety policies and protocols.

The cornerstone of BSA safety is Youth Protection Training (YPT) that all registered adults must complete. Via Youth Protection Training, BSA policy: (1) prohibits any adult to be in a one-on-one situation with any youth other than his or her own child, (2) requires that at least two registered adult leaders be present for all Scouting activities, and (3) requires that any adult present at a Scouting activity for 72 hours or more be a registered volunteer.

Safety trainings for Scoutmasters and trip leaders include Hazardous Weather training, specific trainings for activities such as swimming, climbing, and boating, and for backcountry trips, Wilderness First Aid certification.

What medical safety precautions are in place?

All trip participants (youth and adults) must provide a BSA medical form that includes medical, insurance, and emergency contact information. A link to the BSA medical form can be found on the Troop 56 website under the Forms & Policies tab.

For COVID-19 safety, all age-eligible youth and adults attending an indoor meeting or any trip must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19, barring a medical exemption. Once a youth turns age-eligible, a reasonable amount of time is allowed for becoming vaccinated and during that time, a Scout may continue to participate in troop activities. Masks are required indoors and during group activities.

Update Added January 2022: “Fully vaccinated” means having received or receiving a COVID-19 booster shot when eligible. Medical-grade N95 or KN95/KF94 masks must be worn for troop meetings, activities and trips (except when actively eating or when sleeping); a supply of masks has been purchased for troop use. Rapid antigen tests must be taken by all participants prior to and during overnight trips; a supply has been purchased for troop use.

What is the troop policy for prescription medicines?

All prescription medicines should be listed on an individual’s BSA medical form. This includes asthma and allergy medications, EpiPens, medications for mental health, medications to moderate behavior, and any other prescription medicine. This applies to both youth and adults. Youth who take prescription medicines in order to perform at school or manage everyday tasks (such as medications for behavior and mental health) are expected to continue with their prescribed medicines and doses at all Troop 56 activities, including weekend trips. An adequate supply of prescription medicines should be packed with the Scout’s personal belongings. Scouts are expected to carry and take their own medicines. Trip leaders are encouraged to make daily announcements reminding Scouts to take any needed medications, but the trip leaders do not carry, safe-keep, or administer the medications during troop outings, including overnight trips. Note: Council-hosted summer camps include professional nursing staff, and camps therefore, have different policies for holding and administering prescription medicines.

What are youth behavior expectations?

Troop 56 Youth Code of Conduct and Honor (on the Troop 56 website under the Forms & Policies tab) prohibits:

- Possession or consumption of alcohol, tobacco, or illegal substances
- Sexual activity of any kind
- Exclusion of any Scout
- Physical horseplay
- Unauthorized use of gear, such as stoves and fires not supervised by adults

Additionally, the Troop 56 Code of Conduct also contains a “Brother/Sister Keeper Policy,” and Scouts who are aware of violations listed above but do not report them to a responsible adult are treated as if they too participated in the violation.

How is behavior monitored?

To the extent possible, ordinary behavior issues such as disruptive actions and disagreements among youth are handled by the youth leadership who may use verbal reminders and negotiation. If a problem persists, the youth leader must refer it to the Scoutmaster or other adult leader in charge, and depending on the circumstances, the Scoutmaster may mediate the situation, ask a Scout to leave a meeting, or call a parent to pick up a Scout from a trip.

What is the policy on use of electronics?

Scouts should not bring phones or other electronic devices, including but not limited to music players and gaming devices on outdoor trips. For a detailed description of the policy, refer to the Electronic Device Policy found on the Troop 56 website under the Forms & Policies tab.

Additional Information

Attachments/Links

- Chartering Organization Relationship
- Organizational chart of Youth Leadership Positions, Large Troop
- Organizational chart of Youth Leadership Positions, Small Troop
- Narrative of youth leadership positions
- Trip calendar for the year
- Organizational chart for BSA: national office to the troop level
- Map showing area of Spirit of Adventure council, including Sons of Liberty District

Contact Information

Scoutmaster: David English

Scoutmaster: Liz Green

Venturing Advisor: Robin Bonner

Troop Committee Chair: Jim Wheaton

Charter Organization Representative: Michelle Holmes

Useful websites

Troop/Crew 56 website: <https://www.troopcrew56.org>

Spirit of Adventure Council: <https://www.scoutspirit.org/>

Boy Scouts of America: <https://www.scouting.org/>

Scouts BSA mission statement

“The mission of the Boy Scouts of America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law.”

Scouts BSA Methods of Scouting

The aims of Scouting are met through:

The ideals (Scout oath, law)

The patrol method

The outdoor experience

Advancement

Association with adults

Personal growth

Leadership development

The uniform

Scout Oath

On my honor, I will do my best

To do my duty to God and my country and
to obey the Scout Law;

To help other people at all times;

To keep myself physically strong,
mentally awake, and morally straight.

Scout Law

A Scout is Trustworthy, Loyal, Helpful,

Friendly, Courteous, Kind,

Obedient, Cheerful, Thrifty,

Brave, Clean, and Reverent.

The intangible rewards from Scouting:

One of the strengths of Scouting is its flexibility. Unlike team sports, drama productions, and music bands, which frequently require near-perfect attendance, Scout advancement is self-paced. A youth may integrate Scouting with other interests, and indeed it is encouraged. As with everything in life, however, a youth will get out of Scouting what he or she puts into it. Rank advancement requires a Scout to participate not only in weekly meetings but in the monthly outdoor events.