

Q&A – Eligibility Requirement Updates

Understanding the Decision

Q. What is the BSA’s policy on allowing transgendered youth as members in Scouting?

A. The BSA does not have a policy on transgender youth. For more than 100 years, the BSA, along with schools, youth sports and other youth organizations, have ultimately deferred to the information documented on an individual’s birth certificate to determine eligibility for our single-gender programs, such as Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts. However, that approach is no longer sufficient as communities and state laws are interpreting gender identity differently, and these laws vary widely from state to state.

Q. What is changing?

A. Starting today, we will accept registration in our Scouting programs based on the gender identity provided on an individual’s application. BSA local councils will help facilitate locating units that can provide for the welfare and best interest of the child.

Q. Why are you making this change?

A. For more than 100 years, the BSA, along with schools, youth sports and other youth organizations, have ultimately deferred to the information documented on an individual’s birth certificate to determine eligibility for our single-gender programs. However, that approach is no longer sufficient as communities and state laws are interpreting gender identity differently, and these laws vary widely from state to state.

Q. What programs does this impact?

A. This change to eligibility requirements will impact single-gender programs – Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts. Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts are year-round programs specifically for males in the first grade through age 17. This change does not impact STEM Scouts, Exploring or Venturing.

Q. Can an individual who was born a girl but identifies as a boy join Cub Scouts or Boy Scouts?

A. Yes. We will accept registration in our Scouting programs based on the gender identity provided on an individual’s application.

Q. Can an individual who was born a boy but identifies as a girl join Cub Scouts or Boy Scouts?

A. No. Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts are year-round programs specifically for males in the first grade through age 17. We will accept registration in our Scouting programs based on the gender identity provided on an individual’s application. Transgender girls can join STEM Scouts, Venturing and Exploring, since these programs are available to females.

Q. Is there a benefit to making this decision?

A. We hope that the change in our approach in determining eligibility will enable us to bring the benefits of our programs to as many children, families and communities as possible, and we encourage all interested, eligible youth to apply. Transgender youth face many struggles daily — at school, in their communities, and even at home with their parents and families. They are more likely to be harassed, have higher rates of depression, high levels of anxiety and are more likely to commit suicide than other children. At school, the atmosphere for many is hostile, and it may be even worse at home or in their communities. While it is understandable that our Scouting family may be concerned about how to best serve a transgender boy in Scouting or how welcoming a transgender boy in the program may impact a unit, these statistics shed light on a group of kids that could benefit tremendously from the benefits of Scouting in building character and leadership, as well as the supportive camaraderie and community that results in our units.

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Q. How can this decision be made without my unit's input?

A. While individual units (e.g., Packs, Troops, etc.) are locally associated with community organizations, local councils and units are chartered by the national BSA organization. This means that youth who register to participate in a Scouting program are registered as part of the national organization, which sets eligibility requirements for all councils and participating units. Decisions made regarding participant eligibility are made according to the national requirements – not at the local council or unit level – which do not discriminate with respect to gender identity. If a unit does not think it can offer a safe and welcoming environment, then BSA local councils will help facilitate locating units that can provide for the welfare and best interest of the child.

Q. Is there mounting pressure to be more inclusive and change your policies again?

A. We understand and appreciate that the values and the lessons of Scouting are attractive to the entire family, so we are committed to identifying program options that will help us truly do so. This is an area that we will continue to thoughtfully evaluate in order to bring the benefits of Scouting to the greatest number of youth possible.

How the Decision Affects My Unit

Q: How does this impact religious organizations who sponsor Scouting?

A: While religious partners will continue to have the right to make decisions based on religious beliefs, we will work with families to find local Scouting units that are the best fit for their children. If a religious organization declines to accept a youth or adult application based on their religious beliefs, they should notify the council so that a unit open to accepting the individual can be offered as an option.

Q. Will non-religious chartered organizations be allowed to determine eligibility?

A. As with all Cub Scout packs and Boy Scout troops, volunteer leadership of each unit determines their ability to provide a safe and effective program for the youth who seek membership. Further, decisions made regarding participant eligibility are made according to the national requirements – not at the local council or unit level – which do not discriminate with respect to gender identity. If a unit does not think it can offer a safe and positive environment for these youth members, then BSA local councils will help facilitate locating units that can provide for the welfare and best interest of the child.

Q: What additional Youth Protection Training is needed as a result of this decision?

A: No additional Youth Protection Training is needed; however, it is appropriate to have a heightened sensitivity for youth safety precautions. The Center for Disease Control and other experts have reported that transgender youth are at a significantly higher risk of abuse at the hands of other youth than are other boys. This risk increases as boys grow older and the Scouting program provides more opportunities for youth to be outdoors with less direct supervision. The BSA's Youth-on-Youth Training Materials (available at <http://www.scouting.org/Training/YouthProtection.aspx>) are designed to help adult leaders prevent and react to youth-on-youth incidents that might occur within the context of Scouting, especially in a camping or overnight setting.

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Q: If a transgender boy decides to join our troop, how will we know how to handle the issues that may arise while camping and on other outings?

A: When considering Scouting for a transgender youth, the youth's parents must have an initial discussion with the council and unit addressing the following questions: 1) Is the child living culturally as a boy? 2) Is the child recognized by his family as a boy? And 3) Is the child recognized by his school and/or community as a boy? Living culturally as a boy generally includes dressing as a boy, using a culturally accepted male name or nickname, parents/caregivers using male pronouns when referring to the child, and being considered "a boy" in his daily-life.

The matters set out in the *Transgender Guidelines* (available to local council professional staff) must be discussed and agreed upon by parents, unit leaders, and the boy before the boy joins. This agreement will include a plan that defines expectations for managing the Scouting experience so as to create a welcoming, safe environment. As part of the guidelines, a council professional must be involved in the initial assessment of whether the unit can or will accept the youth and whether there is sufficient common ground to put together an effective plan to address personal privacy, including bathroom and sleeping arrangements.

Q: What bathroom should a transgender boy use? What about tenting/sleeping arrangements?

A: Matters of personal privacy, including bathroom and sleeping arrangements, will be addressed by customized plans developed with input from the transgender boy and his family. More details about the contents of the plan are available in the *Transgender Guidelines* (available to local council Scout Executives.)

Q. Will you provide a list of inclusive units?

A. We don't keep such a list, but we will work with families to find local Scouting units that are the best fit for their children.

Girls in Scouting

Q: Doesn't this decision effectively allow girls in the Cub Scout and Boy Scout program?

A: No, transgender boys are considered boys. This is a legal decision that many states have adopted. Although we previously referred to the information documented on a birth certification to verify eligibility, that approach is no longer sufficient as communities and state laws are interpreting gender identity differently.

Q. Can an individual who was born a boy but identifies as a girl join Cub Scouts or Boy Scouts?

A. No. Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts are year-round programs specifically for males in the first grade through age 17. We will accept registration in our Scouting programs based on the gender identity provided on an individual's application. Transgender girls can join STEM Scouts, Venturing and Exploring, since these programs are available to females.

Q. What Scouting programs are available to young women?

A. The BSA offers programs for girls and young women through Venturing, STEM Scouts and Exploring.