

Tips & Tricks for Virtual Merit Badges

1. Sign people up, THEN give them the code to access the class. This will limit the number of people in your class, and help you track all the Scouts you are working with.
 - a. Also, it lets you plan and limit people for things like Zoom, which only gives you up to 100 people and a 40-minute maximum if you're using the free version.
 - b. Google forms is a great place to get signups, as it time stamps all folks; therefore, if you need to limit it, you can email the folks on this signup and prioritize them for the next class offering.
 - c. You can also use SignupGenius if you need to limit a class; its free, and people don't need an account to sign up for a class
 - i. However, be prepared for messages asking if you can get "one more" Scout into the class
2. Ask folks not to share the class access codes, and explain it is because you need to
 - a. Be able to focus on a small group of Scouts and encourage discussion, and that's a little hard to do with too many people.
 - b. Limit the number of people due to limitations of software and meeting programs
3. Keep a spreadsheet of the Scouts you're working with, if you don't already. I've found it easier to track them and ensure I'm YPT compliant if I have the following information:
 - a. Scout Name
 - b. Scout Email (or an email address they can be reached at)
 - c. Parent Name
 - d. Parent email- I can copy a parent on a reply email if a Scout forgets to copy a parent when they email me
 - e. Scoutbook or Paper? If you're doing virtual blue cards, this makes it a LOT easier to go in and find them to update the requirements they've completed; it also lets you watch your mail or email for scanned or mailed physical blue cards.
 - f. I'm also tracking the following because its good data to see how offering the virtual MB's are helping our Scouts, and helping them progress in Rank; its also fun to see where everyone is from
 - i. Scout Rank
 - ii. Scout Troop
 - iii. Scout's Council
 - iv. Scout's State (I'm not good enough to know where every council is...yet!)
 - g. Scout's Time Zone- this helps in planning meetings and follow-ups; I'm EST and working with Scouts from Maine to California.
 - h. Date MB Completed: This lets me know they finished, lets me double check I've signed the cards, and will let me send out a reminder if I don't hear from a Scout for a while, gently. Keep in mind they're doing a LOT of schoolwork right now as well as Scouting stuff.
4. Multifaceted makes life easier. Right now, I'm leveraging the following technologies:
 - a. Zoom for teaching the topics and follow-up discussion groups; this allows me to do both video conferences as well as group phone calls for those with limited internet access or bandwidth
 - b. Google Classrooms for offline work
 - i. Completing Merit Badge Workbook assignments not covered in class (prerequisites, etc.)

- ii. A copy of the online presentation slides
(PowerPoint, saved as a PDF to save bandwidth)
 - iii. A recording of the online class, if you want
 - iv. A course and MBC evaluation
 - c. Signup Genius, so Scouts can schedule a meeting with me for online discussion of topics not covered in the class; I'm doing these as small groups, as I've currently got about 85 Scouts working on one Merit Badge
- 5. While we all know Scouts are supposed to be the ones reaching out, many times the emails are coming from parents. Be patient in reminding them the Scout to be the one needs to reach out; this is a scary time for parents; with all the kids being at home, without the normal bustle of running from activity to activity, the parents are just as overwhelmed by the lack of activities as the kids are.
 - a. You will also get a lot of Scouts who do not have their own email addresses emailing from their parent's email accounts; if there is not another adult copied, and they don't explicitly say "this is my mom's account", copy another trusted adult you know when replying to the email
 - b. You can also make some inferences that a child is using a parent's account; if its signed "Billy Smith" but the email is janesmith@email, there is a good chance Billy is using mom's account. Still, copy another adult for your own YPT and peace of mind. (My Committee Chair is getting CC'd on a LOT of emails this week!)
- 6. In your emails and conferences, find positives for the Scouts, and for the parents.
 - a. Thank them for being willing to try new things in their Scouting journey, for trusting you to help them; remind them its OK to be scared or nervous. Thank the parents for allowing their Scouts to try something new and supporting Scouting in new ways.
 - b. Tell your Scouts to go outside and take a break. I had a Scout tell me they'd not gone outside their house in 8 days because they were scared- their yards should not be a scary place for them, so remind them of that.
 - c. Be cheerful, brave, courteous, kind, loyal, helpful, and trustworthy- and remind them a Scout is clean (#handwashingsaveslives!). This is scary stuff for kid and teens, even more so for Scouts, who many look to as examples to their community and families, of how to react in times like this because they're always prepared. (See what I did there?)
- 7. Remember, they're still kids; they're going to goof around in classes and on chats, they're going to have moments where they're not perfect students, and that is OK.
- 8. Don't be upset when people ask you to prove you're a counselor for a merit badge, or if they ask for your YPT. Parents are used to protecting their kids from the unknown; unlike that guy in the van with the free candy all parents worry about, right now, they're also parenting in the world of a virus they can't see, and we've all seen those shows about predators online. Every bit of reassurance we can give parents about who we are and that we are here to serve their Scouts with good intentions is worth it- they're scared too, about jobs, providing, and the million other things we ourselves are worried about. A moment to attach a copy of your YPT to meeting information is worth it.