



# Membership Policy Transition

## Resource Handout

### Membership Policy Change Background

The National Order of the Arrow Committee passed a resolution that changes their membership policies to align with changes approved by the Executive Board of the BSA. The new OA membership policy provides for OA elections in all Scouts BSA troops, Venturing Crews and Sea Scout Ships effective February 1st, 2019 and allows election of both male and female members of their units to the Order of the Arrow.

This change in policy has resulted in numerous questions regarding how current policies and practices will be impacted at all levels within the OA. This document is intended to be a point of reference to find answers to those questions as we navigate through this transition.

### Order of the Arrow membership requirements

- Be a registered member of the Boy Scouts of America.
- Have experienced 15 nights of 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.
- At the time of their election, youth must be under the age of 21, hold the Scouts BSA First Class rank, the Venturing Discovery Award, or the Sea Scout Ordinary rank or higher, and following approval by the Scoutmaster, Crew Advisor or Sea Scout Skipper, be elected by the youth members of their unit.
- Adults (age 21 or older) who meet the camping requirements may be selected following nomination to and approval by the lodge adult selection committee.

### Youth Protection Guidelines

Youth protection guidelines for Order of the Arrow events with female youth present are the same as with any Scouting event with female youth present and are specified in the [Guide to Safe Scouting](#). More information is available at <https://oa-bsa.org/about/membership/youth-protection-policies>.

The application of the youth protection principles during Ordeals include:

- Separated overnight camping areas for male and female candidates
- Random walkthroughs of overnight camping areas by two adults 21 or over, one of which must be female when female youth are participating.

### Youth Leadership Opportunities

All leadership positions in the OA will be open to female OA members on an equal basis with their male counterparts. All OA youth members, regardless of Scouting program source, will be eligible to run for section chief. Regional and National Officers will continue to be chosen from those elected as Section Chiefs.





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The underlying principle which you will find applies in all circumstances is that female OA members are to be provided the same opportunities as their male counterparts.

### Use of Gender-Neutral Terminology

In general, OA publications and ceremonies are being updated to incorporate broader use of gender-neutral terminology so that all members feel equally welcome. The use of "Arrowmen," "Brother," and "Brotherhood" will continue as focus group discussions we have held with female Scouters and youth recommend we do not change the use of those terms.

### Ceremonial Changes

Ceremony guidelines are also being updated primarily to incorporate gender-neutral language into existing ceremonies.

### Use of American Indian Clothing

Any rumors that suggest the OA is distancing itself from the use of American Indian regalia are false. What we are doing is strengthening our policies to ensure when American Indian clothing and other regalia are used that we ensure it is respectful of the American Indian cultures in our local area and of those we are emulating, particularly with respect to the introduction of female youth as ceremonialists and as dance competition participants.

The National OA Committee is developing evaluation criteria for four new dance styles: Fancy Shawl, Jingle Dress, Woman's Northern Traditional and Women's Southern Traditional.

Guidance clarifying the use of American Indian clothing has been published and is available at <https://oa-bsa.org/about/membership/american-indian-clothing-and-symbols>.

Female youth participation in OA ceremonies: Female youth members must be accorded the same opportunity as male youth members with respect to participation in OA ceremonies. The frequent question we hear is can females be chief. The short answer is there are numerous examples of female chiefs in American Indian culture and that in itself is not a limiting factor; however, we must still satisfy ourselves that we are being respectful of the cultures we are emulating. If a conflict exists that cannot be resolved, the principle of equal opportunity takes precedence and the lodge/chapter will have to shift to a format of conducting OA ceremonies in alternative authorized clothing. Currently the only authorized alternative is to conduct OA ceremonies in complete field uniform. A second option is being explored.

Each region has AIA folks identified who are key source leads for AIA/ICE questions (such as ceremonial clothing, dance styles for young women, etc.). Additional questions can be sent to: Ron Bell ([Ironbell@bellsouth.net](mailto:Ironbell@bellsouth.net)) and Darrell Donahue ([woodley.dd@gmail.com](mailto:woodley.dd@gmail.com)).

### Unit Elections

Unit elections under the new membership policy are authorized beginning February 1st, 2019 when the revised membership policy takes effect, not before. Elections held in Venturing and Sea Scout ships on that date or after should be scheduled and conducted in the same manner as those held in troops. Lodges and chapters should prepare their election teams for the need for more thorough explanations of the OA since many of these Scouts may have no prior knowledge of our Order.





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Youth may be eligible for election in more than one unit. To be eligible for election, the youth must meet the applicable requirements of the BSA program in which they are being considered (Venturing, Sea Scouts or Scouts BSA). The one exception might be in meeting the camping requirement.

There has been some confusion over what camping qualifies in meeting the membership requirement for camping. These factors apply:

- Camping must be under the auspices of an approved BSA program.
- The decision on what specific camping meets the spirit and intent of the camping requirement rests with the unit leader of the unit in which the youth is being considered for election.
- 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.
- The term “ship nights” refers to nights during with the individual slept overnight on their ship. The ship need not be underway during that period for the nights to qualify.

Once elected in any unit, a youth is no longer eligible for election in another unit. In the rare instance a youth was elected in a second unit because they were not yet notified of their election in another unit, the lodge will determine the unit of election based on the unit with the earliest date of election.

### OA Unit Representatives

The former OA Troop Representative Program is being renamed the OA Unit Representative Program and is being expanded to allow for OA Unit Representatives in Venturing Crews and Sea Scout Ships. Clarifying guidance on this program will be published in the upcoming OA Unit Representative Support Pack, found online at [oa-bsa.org/about/membership](http://oa-bsa.org/about/membership).

The Unit of Excellence Award criteria is being updated to align it with the new OA Unit Representative Support Pack guidelines and will be published simultaneously.

### *Frequently Asked Questions*

- **Given that the youth protection guidelines require a 21 or older registered female at all activities involving female youth, won't we need more female leaders in the OA?** Lodges should be taking a serious look at this issue now. If their adult female membership or engagement is inadequate to support the introduction of female youth, that should become a priority issue for the lodge and council to address.
- **Are lodges going to be required to have a female chapter, lodge, or section adviser?** The only requirement is that youth protection policies are followed that require a registered female adult, 21 year of age or older, to be present at all meetings and activities where female youth members are present. That said, we should be providing female adults the same opportunity as their male counterparts to serve in these adult leadership positions.
- **If you don't get elected in your troop, do you have to wait a year to be eligible in your crew?** No, a youth member can participate in an election held by any unit in which they are determined eligible by their unit leader, regardless of whether they were qualified in another unit. As a reminder, each unit is entitled to hold only one election annually.





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- **Can you wear the lodge flap on the uniform (if in different units) if not elected in that unit?** Once elected to the OA, you may wear the lodge flap on any authorized BSA uniform.
- **Are there restrictions regarding communication between male and female youth members (e.g., via email)?** Youth protection guidelines apply to all OA communications. As a reminder, protection of privacy must also be maintained (e.g., email should only be used for official OA communications and listings of email addresses should be protected)
- **If a leader says no to one person on an election, but another unit leader approves, which has precedent?** Each unit election is an independent event. A member may be elected in any unit in which they are qualified by that unit leader regardless of the fact they may not have been qualified or elected in another unit. Once elected in any unit, the member is no longer eligible for election in another unit.
- **Can the lodge flap be worn on the Venturing uniform?** The current Venturing shirt has a pocket that accommodates standard OA flaps.
- **Will there be encouragement from the OA to venturing crews for youth to use ranks?** The crew determines its programming and hence the degree to which they emphasize rank advancement. If the youth are interested in becoming OA members, we would expect they will push the unit toward implementing the rank program. If asked, OA members should support and encourage all units to provide rank advancement and leadership opportunities for their youth.
- **As far as ceremonies, what do lodges do if the local tribe does not approve of a female chief, ceremonialist, etc?** If American Indian clothing cannot be used without offending local tribes, alternative authorized clothing will have to be used.
- **If a lodge uses field uniforms for a ceremony with a female member can they go back to regalia if there is not a female member of the team?** Yes, provided the American Indian clothing is culturally acceptable and female youth were given equal opportunity to participate as ceremony members (e.g., female youth should never be made to feel they should not participate because doing so would require the lodge to not use American Indian clothing in their ceremonies)
- **Should lodges change their elections to accommodate the Feb. 1 change?** No. There is no need to do so.
- **Will a youth Arrowman have to take YPT?** The OA will follow whatever policy is promulgated by BSA regarding youth protection. No policy is anticipated that would single out OA youth for any special youth protection training beyond that they receive in their units.
- **How will the OA work with the Venturing Officers Association to not take away from youth positions in both programs?** The two programs are separate and have been providing youth leadership opportunities to their members for years. No change is anticipated.
- **Can girls dance traditionally male dance styles in OA dance competitions?** No. Guidelines for four new dance styles appropriate for female dancers are being developed for use in OA dance competitions. Those will be the options judged for female dances in OA dance competitions.
- **For a COC, if a lodge brings girls to the COC without a female adviser, do we still hold the COC meeting?** You must have an adult female 21 years of age or old in order to conduct the meeting if a female youth member is present. Lodges/Chapters must ensure adequate adult female participation is included to avoid this type circumstance from developing.

