

SPECIAL INTEREST AREAS – Why?

V1.1

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Some of the early Youth Program Review feedback highlighted that

- Proficiency and achievement badges were continually out of date (use a mantle, develop a film, use a floppy disk)
- Youth members wanted to be challenged versus ripping through a checklist of tedious tasks
- Youth members wanted to drive their journey and do challenges that interested them
- Technology is a part of the lives of all young people and so needs to be a part of their Scouting world to assist, benefit and make a difference

*Scouting is a **non-formal education** movement which means we're all about developing young people as individuals, as responsible citizens and as members of their local, national and international communities.*

Further Youth Program Review feedback said our youth members wanted to

- Take more responsibility for their program
- Have a voice in their organisation
- Participate in a program that is adventurous, fun, challenging and inclusive

We also need to consider that 21st-century **formal education** is no longer about knowledge gathering and rote learning. We know that many schools are beating us at our own game – flipped classrooms, outdoor learning, project-based learning, student goal setting, student voice are all empowering students to take control of their learning, giving learning purpose and direction.

The Special Interest Areas encourage Scouts from all sections to try new challenges plus pursue existing interests to greater depths. Scouts set their own goals, enabling them to design a project that interests and challenges them personally.

Special Interest Areas

Are broad, encouraging Scouts to pursue a diversity of interests and to ensure any activity a Scout could think of can be included

- Are measured against an individual's personal best
- Use Plan>Do>Review> to set and achieve their goals
- Give young people ownership of their development
- Teach Scouts to set, plan towards, and achieve goals

The Scout Method is our tool to deliver the program.

The Scout Method is a system of progressive non-formal self-education and is made up of elements which work together to provide a rich, active, and fun learning environment. It is the Scout Method that makes Scouting genuinely unique as an educational movement of young people.



Today, youth members focus on their Achievement Pathways. This allows personal progression as a continuous series of personal achievements. Each person's exploration of the Achievement Pathways will be different, but as equally rewarding.

The Special Interest Areas – the problem for younger sections

With the old program (in many units), adults created a program for youth members based around the award scheme. Scouts would participate in some activities then suddenly be presented with a badge. Maybe they knew what they learnt and perhaps were challenged by the experience.

This model doesn't fit in with the YPR feedback that was provided and doesn't match 21st-century learning models. We needed to rethink how we program and the role of adults.

The Special Interest Areas are not designed to be a whole unit activity. The program is created by youth members using the Challenge Areas.

The role of adults

When our program was being developed, there was a heap of concern that adults were no longer needed! – Hopefully, that myth has been debunked! But, – the role of adults must change!

We now talk about mentoring, supporting, coaching. The adult role will continually change and evolve depending on the skills and abilities of individual youth members and the unit as a whole at any given time. This approach is essential to ensure success with Assisting and Leading. It is also crucial with the Special Interest Areas.

Don't look at today – look into the future

Change takes time, so we need to look ahead and imagine Australian Scouting in five or ten years, and our new program is fantastic. Imagine those Joey Scouts now in Venturer Scouts or Rover Scouts who have been leading activities for ten years. They led patrols and project patrols, achieved success in the Outdoor Adventure Skills, have high-level skills to Plan> Do> Review> and know how to goal set and achieve personal challenges thanks to the Special Interest Areas. As adults, we can be full of pride to know we have helped develop genuinely amazing young people who are creating a better world.

It will take time

This is a new approach; it will take time.

- The Special Interest Area project planning tools in Scouts | Terrain have been adapted from the Record Books to make the planning easier for youth members
- Adult leaders and youth members will take time to understand the process for Special Interest Area projects – especially for youth members to be empowered to create their projects.

- When units transitioned, it was suggested that Special Interest Area projects be completed in patrols to model the process.
 - The unit might choose an area, and then in patrols, an adult supports the patrol to goal set, establish a plan and document the intentions.
 - The initial work might start at the unit, and then the project is finished at home.
 - The adult leader can then check in on progress, provide support and assist as required. The patrols could be interest, ability or age-based.
- Units could brainstorm a heap of ideas under each of the Special Interest Area topics to display on the wall
- An adult leader might arrive early or stay late for youth members to seek support to plan a Special Interest Area project.
- Parents can be encouraged to support a youth member to plan a Special Interest Area project – they will be able to access Scouts | Terrain and the associated resources. For younger youth members they can help in the doing
- Youth members from older sections might come along and have a primary focus in helping in the planning and documenting of a Special Interest Area project with younger youth members. This can be an excellent role for parent helpers as well.
- The Special Interest Areas do not replace achievement of Proficiency badges. They are a whole new approach and so need a different approach to implementation.

Bulk Uploads

There are some concerns that you can't bulk upload Special Interest Areas into Scouts | Terrain. The challenge is, how can you bulk upload something different (even slightly) for each youth member? We want them to be empowered, to learn to Plan> Do> Review and take control of their Scouting adventure. That means we need to take risks and explore new ways to make it happen.

We can do this!

We are confident that this approach to Special Interest Areas can be successful. Why? – Because it is already happening in units across Australia.

