

Guidelines for the William T. Hornaday Award Conservation Advisor

These guidelines are written to assist individuals serving as a conservation advisor to a Boy Scout or Venturer working on one of the William T. Hornaday medals. As an advisor, you should be a professional, or at least recognized as a highly qualified amateur, in an area related to the conservation of our natural resources. You probably have a degree in one of the natural sciences, maybe even an advanced degree. These guidelines are written for those who may not have heard about Dr. Hornaday and his awards or know of his work, and for those not well-versed in the programs of the Boy Scouts of America.

Background:

Dr. William Temple Hornaday established these awards (originally called the Wildlife Protection Medal) in 1914 with the Permanent Wild Life Protection Fund, even though there is a reference to a medal being given as early as 1904. Since 1914, there have been just over 1000 awards issued. It is the oldest continuously issued conservation award in the United States and one of the most prestigious. It has been reported that Aldo Leopold held the medal he received from Dr. Hornaday in high regard.

Dr. Hornaday, one of this country's first advocates for wildlife, played a critical role in the establishment of our current zoological system. He is personally credited with saving the American Bison from extinction. He helped pass the Federal Migratory Bird Law and the 1911 Fur Seal Treaty. He helped found the Campfire Clubs of America and was a long time supporter for the Boy Scouts of America. Dr. Hornaday believed strongly in the power of youth, that a single individual could make a difference. He also believed that "almost any reform is possible." His motto was "Open wide to youth all gateways to nature."

Dr. Hornaday's concept for this award is best summarized by excerpts from a letter he wrote on November 16, 1933, to all Scouts regarding the gold honor badge. The letter states in part:

"...Actual results...count heavily...small services costing very little effort do not forcibly impress...it requires no effort to write an essay on birds and comparatively small effort to deliver a short talk on birds with incidental reference to bird protection. ...A boy must hustle and really accomplish something in order to be picked out... A Scout cannot be picked out of six hundred thousand and decorated with a Gold Honor Badge...for unusual and distinguished service to wild life unless his record is worth while to be printed for the six hundred thousand to see. It will not do to have a thousand scouts exclaim when they read it 'Pshaw! I have done more than that.' Unusual prizes are to be won only by unusual services."

Dr. Hornaday concludes his letter with the following:

"Look about you. Study the wild life of the 20 miles around you, and determine wherein any of it is being unjustly treated. ... I cannot possibly decide for you what you ought to do in your locality. Investigate thoroughly, then you can decide, far better than I, what you ought to do. Work for the benefit of the distressed and abused wild birds and quadruped and fishes, and not merely to win a gold badge. The cause is the thing to work for!"

Dr. Hornaday was not one to mince words. An obituary about him (he died in 1937) reads in part:

"His fearlessness and the vigor of his attack frequently made him enemies...his courage and sincerity were potent factors in arousing public opinion. His written words had often the sting of a rapier thrust. He was an unrelenting adversary and it is due to him as much as to any other man in this country that we now have what remains of our heritage of wildlife. To all those who knew him well, he was a splendid and loyal friend and behind the hundreds of admirers...stand the mute inhabitants of our forests and uplands, who found him a stout hearted and able defender."

The citation on his induction into the National Wildlife Federation's Conservation Hall of Fame states:

"With a pen as his weapon, William Temple Hornaday fought passionately for the earliest wildlife protection laws. ... Hornaday's zeal passed to new generations in his work with youth education programs. He advocated conservation in over twenty books and hundreds of articles: through them his pioneering efforts guide wildlife protection today."

Over the years the awards have been broadened to include fields of conservation beyond wildlife to the point that the present-day medals require individuals to address a different field of conservation with each project they do. In 1974 the responsibility of the awards was transferred from the New York Zoological Society to the William T. Hornaday Memorial Trust and then to the Boy Scouts of America. In 1975 the single gold medal was replaced with the present gold, silver, and bronze medals.

Your Role as Advisor:

So what is your role as an advisor? Being asked to be an advisor by a young person working on this award is both an honor and a responsibility. The role of the advisor is perhaps the single most important element in an applicant's success. This is not a short-term commitment. On average it will take an individual nearly two years to complete the requirements for either the bronze or silver medals.

You are part of a team that consists of the youth's unit leader (Scoutmaster or crew Advisor), the conservation advisor (you), and most likely individual project advisors (most often land managers for the project location). Depending on the situation, several others, either from the youth's unit or the BSA local council office, may work with you. The local council will have a process for approving Hornaday applications before forwarding them on to the national office. Again, depending on the situation, individuals may want to take part at various points throughout the process.

As a conservation professional you bring a special perspective to the Scout working on these awards. You will be their guide, a catalyst, taking the Scout's interest in a species or concern for a place, from a mere idea, through education and into constructive, effective action where they actually make a difference! You can help them understand what the scientific method is. How their questions and concerns may lead them to conduct investigations, analyze data, and draw conclusions about the world around them. Your knowledge and professionalism can guide them to understand the world. That natural cycles, the interaction and interdependencies between species, natural disasters, and the influence of man are all part of the ecosystem often clouding what at first glance may be perceived as a clear course of action. When all things are considered, a solution is very seldom black or white, but shades of gray, which take into account not only the natural systems but the social and political ones as well. While a course of action for an individual problem for an individual species may be clear, in order to make a long lasting effect it may need to be mitigated for other species in the area or the practices of people in the local community. It is perhaps because of this that Dr. Hornaday considered a very important part of this award to be the education and the attempt to change the attitudes of others around us. You also can introduce the Scout to the bigger picture of conservation and its many varied fields of expertise. You can also introduce them to the many agencies and organizations that are working in their area that can serve as resources for them.

The Projects:

The bulk of these awards require the Scout to conduct several significant conservation projects, each in a different field of conservation. The specific fields of conservation allowed are listed on the application. There is no set rule for what makes a project significant. Certainly Dr. Hornaday was looking for that outstanding youth whose actions were truly worthy of note. The criteria used for Eagle Scout service projects to have a long lasting benefit for church, school, or community may be a good one to follow here as well. The Scout is required to plan, lead, and carry out these projects and as Dr. Hornaday stated, "actual results ... count heavily."

Picking a suitable project is one of the first difficult steps for the Scout to overcome. As stated above, your guidance here is very important. The project must be “significant” enough without being of such a scale that it totally overwhelms the Scout. Many youth will focus on those projects that manipulate the environment, and while many projects do require the use of a shovel, an inventory or education project can also create significant benefit.

While we don’t really define “significant,” it might help if we look at the same project executed two different ways. In one case a Scout gets some of the members of his or her unit to go out and plant a few hundred seedlings in an old burned over area. In another, the Scout does some research into why the area hasn’t naturally regenerated, what native species are common to the area, conducts an inventory, finds a good reliable source for those native plants, designs a tree planting event, and through flyers, radio spots, newspaper articles, etc. gets the community to turn out with their unit and plant those same few hundred seedlings, and the following year goes back to the area to document survival to see if replanting may be needed. The actual results (planting the seedlings) for these two projects are the same. Some reviewers may consider both significant. However, the second example does stand out in several areas, would have a better chance of successfully passing any review it may face, and results in better education of the Scout, the unit, and the community.

The Scout must plan, lead, and carry out these projects for themselves, but not necessarily by themselves. That means that they should learn what resources are available to them and how to use them and their expertise. Your knowledge and guidance is necessary, but you have to be careful not to do too much. If the Scout is directed too much, by you, the land manager for the area, or anyone, they may not be able to show the leadership that is necessary to be able to call the project their own. They should be able to demonstrate all of the steps in the project from idea germination, through alternatives presented to the land manager for selection, to project completion, and documentation. Be sure and work with the unit leader, the local Council, and all of the members of the team to become familiar with Scout methods and rules and the roles that everyone in your local area should play.

Many times a Scout’s interest in the environment gets a large boost from completing their first project and they get hungry to do more. Each conservation project must be placed in a different category listed on the application. Some generic types of projects may be able to fit in several different categories depending on specific local circumstances. For instance, a trail reconstruction project may fit in soil and water conservation if it was done to address erosion, fish and wildlife management if it was done to reduce the impacts of human intervention into critical habitat, or may not be a Hornaday project at all if it was not done to address an environmental problem but rather only for recreational access. On the other hand several projects may be very closely related. For instance, a specific site may be able to support separate projects in forestry and range management, soil and water conservation, and air and water pollution control. However, if this is the case each project must be able to stand on its own and specific work items cannot be double counted in the different projects. The relationships between these projects should also be very carefully explained so that questions that the reviewers may raise will be answered in the documentation.

Documentation:

The old adage, “The job is not done until the paperwork is complete,” applies for the Hornaday Awards as well. For many applicants this will be the hardest part of the entire process. As a professional you are well aware of the need to produce good documentation of your process and findings. A good guide for how the Boy Scouts of America approach documenting a project is the “Eagle Scout Leadership Service Project Workbook.” (Part no. 18-927A) Scouts are required to use this workbook as they work on their Eagle Scout rank, so it should be readily available to you. This workbook helps the applicant by dividing the project write up into separate sections that are easier to address. Another good source is the official Hornaday Award web site maintained by the Boy Scouts. (<http://www.scouting.org/awards/hornaday>) This web site includes a section that describes the elements of the project that the National Hornaday Awards Committee is looking to be addressed in the write up (“How Applications Are Judged”). It is also important to note that the project descriptions are all that the committee has to review during its deliberations. It also doesn’t hurt to include an extra project or two just in case one may be determined not to stand up to the high standards expected for the Hornaday award.

Many youth focus on the actual time spent in the field working with others to complete the project, and often don't realize all of the preparation, research, negotiation, design, approvals, etc. that they also completed. It is not uncommon to review a first draft of the documentation for a project where the Scout only describes the mechanics of the fieldwork, including the transportation and feeding of the work crew. You can help the applicant realize all that they have done and that they need to capture that effort in the documentation as well. It is also important for the Scout to capture in the documentation the reasons why the Scout chose this project and did what they did. Supporting materials (letters, newspaper articles, photos, etc.) are also necessary to include. A letter from the benefiting group accepting the project completed by the applicant is almost a requirement.

It is not easy for most youth to sit down and complete the sometime significant documentation required, let alone have their work reviewed and corrected by an adult. Remember how you might have felt the first time you had a supervisor provide significant constructive criticism on a paper that was difficult for you to produce in the first place and you might understand some of the frustration that these young applicants are going through. You can be empathetic and help them understand that this process is normal in the professional world and will help them arrive at a better product with a much higher chance of receiving a favorable review by both the Council and the national review committees. You will also want to work closely with the applicant's unit leaders as the documentation and the entire package is developed.

Special Circumstances:

There are some special circumstances that you should also be aware of. These include a Lone Scout (an individual in Scouting without the normal support mechanism of a Troop or Crew) or possible physical or mental disabilities. It is the policy of the Boy Scouts of America that every individual be given the opportunity to succeed regardless of any of these circumstances. If you encounter a situation that appears to be a hindrance for the individual you are working with you should contact their unit leader or the Council headquarters in your area and ask for their advise on how to work with these circumstances and creative ways to proceed and present materials so that we can provide the applicant with the greatest chance of success.