Factsheet

Special Interest Areas

Special Interest Areas encourage young people to try new things and pursue their existing interests. Scouts set their own goals, enabling them to design a project that interests and challenges them personally. The six areas are broad, encouraging Scouts to pursue a diversity of interests and to ensure any activity a Scout could possibly think of can be covered. Individuals setting their own goals ensures that the Special Interest Areas remain modern and relevant in a changing world, and can be tailored to be inclusive to all.

The challenges within Special Interest Areas are set by Scouts using Plan>Do>Review>, usually all within a set time frame. When proposing a Special Interest Area project, Scouts set their own goals. They will need to take into account their existing level of knowledge, what they are interested in pursuing or learning about, if they have Subject Matter Experts available to assist them, and what skills they will need to develop to achieve their goals. The **Plan>** will cover how they will develop their new skills, what things they may need to plan (logistics, building an item etc.). The **Do>** will be where they develop their new skills or carry out the main body of project, and in the **Review>** they will consider what they learnt and how it could be improved upon next time. Please refer to the Special Interest Area planning templates, adult support guide and the digital system for support to plan Special Interest Areas.

Whilst the intention for Special Interest Areas is to enable Scouts to pursue topics or activities that specifically interest them, work may be completed individually, in Patrols or as a whole Unit. No matter how the goals are being pursued, it should continue to be about an individual doing their best.

The Special Interest Areas are:

- Adventure & Sport
- Arts & Literature
- Creating a Better World
- Environment
- Growth & Development
- STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) & Innovation

Each of the individual Special Interest Areas are discussed below in more detail. Additionally, links between the Special Interest Areas and the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been outlined. As a global movement, Scouting has partnered with the UN to action the SDGs, and as a National Scout Organisation (NSO), Scouts Australia is pursuing a number of initiatives to ensure these can be embedded in the program – Special Interest Areas is one of these mechanisms, and an opportunity for Scouts to continue to 'create a better world'.



There are a large amount of resources that have been created for the purpose of supporting youth members in their undertaking and completion of the Special Interest Areas.
These include resources such as:

- The Guide to Special Interest Areas
- Special Interest Areas Flowchart
- Special Interest Areas Planning Tool
- The Program Handbook
- Digital system & Youth Member Guides

You can find all of these resources on:
https://pr.scouts.com.au.

You can also find a lot of helpful articles online about supporting children and adolescence to set and achieve goals and about teach youth about SMART goals.

Arts and Literature

The Arts and Literature Special Interest Area is all about expressing oneself, being imaginative, and pushing creative boundaries. There is a very wide range of areas that can be explored through this Special Interest Area – performing, visual and creative arts, learning to appreciate art and different mediums, bringing a favourite imaginary hero to life, and putting on a mask to dramatize a play. What about creating a short film, learning new photography techniques, constructing prose, or designing an outfit? Respectful exploration and learning about another culture's art forms, trying out different roles in the creative process – being the director or joining the dance team, making music, and many, many more.

Adventure and Sports

Anything worth doing is hard. This Special Interest Area is all about adrenaline, and also offers the opportunity of expanding the areas of physical personal prowess in ways that are not covered by the Outdoor Adventure Skills. There are many adventures available – as many as Scouts can think of! A Scout could go on a single journey, say 4WDing through the high country, or build up time over weeks or months such as learning to fly a light aircraft. There is the opportunity of learning new skills in sports, such as basketball or javelin, or to try out totally new activities like hang-gliding or hot-air ballooning. Does a Scout want to learn how to swim a new stroke, run a new distance, kick a goal from the 50m line, or follow in the footsteps of their ancestors? This is their opportunity!

If a youth member wants to learn to hike, then that is well covered through the Outdoor Adventure Skills. However, there may be times when they wish to do something different, a physical activity that is not covered by the Outdoor Adventure Skills, and this Special Interest Area is perfect for that. There may also be times when Scouts want to do activities that are covered by Outdoor Adventure Skills, but where their current goal expands different skills to where they are up to in those progressions. They may have already progressed past doing weekend hikes in their Outdoor Adventure Skills stages, but they wish to undertake an adventure that will involve a weekend hike. On this hike, however, their chosen skill development area may be on organising logistics, supporting others, understanding biodynamics, or even getting back into physical activity after an injury.

A youth member may additionally have cross over between Special Interest Areas and Outdoor Adventure Skills. For example; a Rover Scout is not a good swimmer but decides to challenge themselves they will set a goal for a Special Interest Area to run a Joey Scout Aquatics Day at the local pool. This will likely involve the Rover Scout planning logistics, advertising, contact the Joey Units and the local pool however will also require the Rover Scout to develop their own skills in the Aquatic Outdoor Adventure Skills maybe up to Stages 3 or 4. You can see how the end goal expands on the achievement of Outdoor Adventure Skills rather then the goal being the achievement of an Outdoor Adventure Skills Stage.

Creating a Better World

This Special Interest Area is all about following the fundamentals of Scouting and the Scout Law in an effort to contribute to the world in a positive way. The purpose of this Special Interest Area is to contribute something to your local community that will help to make it a better and more positive place for all. Clean Up Australia Day, donating blood, learning AUSLAN, community development projects, projects to help disadvantaged people, engaging with the local community and contributing to them. These projects often involve other community members or groups, and can be done in conjunction with some of the additional badges such as World Scout Environment Badge or the Scouts of the World Award. Additionally this Special Interest Area leads itself to actioning the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

All 'Creating a Better World' Special Interest Area badges should be registered as a Messengers of Peace Project on www.scout.org. Using the Messengers of Peace platform means that people and Scouts from all around the globe will be able to see the project and be inspired to also make the world a better place.

Environment

This Special Interest Area focuses on the natural environment and actions that Scouts can take to protect, enhance or learn more about it. It could be citizen science projects, understanding waste and recycling, learning about the water cycle, planting trees, taking action on climate change, restoring ecosystems, preparing for environmental hazards and disasters, or conducting experiments to see how natural processes work. Some projects can also be done in conjunction with the World Scout Environment Badge, and in some cases Scouts of the World Award, UN Sustainable Development Goals and Messengers of Peace.

Growth and Development

The Special Interest Area of Growth and Development is about cultivating oneself as a person, understanding others, and evolving in new skill areas. The purpose of Growth & Development is to challenge a specific area of your skills, and to really give something a go! You should set a goal of personal growth for some aspect of your life, and strive towards reaching this goal. Along the way, you might end up a stronger runner, or a good postmodern artist, or able to speak in public a lot better. No matter the challenge you set for this project for yourself, you will have developed and grown as a person.

STEM and Innovation

The Special Interest Area of STEM and Innovation has the purpose of developing the powerful questioning, curious, scientific mind that young people often have. This Special Interest Area is all about exploring your inner scientist, and answering questions you have always pondered. What happens when you mix mentos' and coke? What is the best way to build a paper plane wing? How can you build a mouse trap car that travels 20 meters... or more! Come up with a question, or challenge yourself in any area of science, experimentation and innovation and then test it through your project or challenge. The sky is the limit here.



Activities

Activities and interests that Scouts choose can be a new idea they have not tried out before, or their continued development of an existing interest. A Scout could take up photography and learn the basics, while another Scout challenges themselves to develop their existing photographic skills – perhaps using camera settings they haven't tried before, touching up their images using software, or trying more complex situations like capturing fast moving subjects.

To help in the process of setting goals and determining activities, there are activity ideas under each area heading and there will be many worked examples with goal ideas that Scouts can use for inspiration. For some activity areas, Scouts may choose to use community standards to help set their goals, such as an amateur radio license, or completing an AUSLAN course. Any course related component shouldn't be the end goal, however it may be a mechanism to reach the Do> component. For example the goal may be to teach the Patrol how to sign a sentence in AUSLAN. Part of the smaller goals for that project is to do an AUSLAN course. With anything in Scouting, the 'why' is just as important as the 'what' and therefore the Unit Council and adults should always support youth to question 'why' they want to achieve particular goals.

Scouts can undertake multiple projects in each Special Interest Area. For example, completing two STEM Projects – one in 3D printing and one in scientific experiments. These subsequent projects must still have their own goals set. It is also possible to complete multiple projects in the same activity, so long as the goals set for each project are different to each other and subsequent projects extend the Scout and challenge them to learn more skills; they should not be used to just reward Scouts for continuing an activity.

Extra-curricular activities are able to be used as Special Interest Areas, including those organized through a school. For example, a Scout who joins their school debating team or learns an instrument could earn a badge in the Growth and Development or Arts and Literature areas, so long as they set themselves challenging goals, and follow the process outlined throughout this document.

Remember, Special Interest Areas are about the youth setting goals to a broader project and having that approved by the Unit Council before they set out to achieve that goal.... the process of thinking about what they want to achieve and how they are going to do it is in some respects far more important then them achieving it at the end.

