

AMBU Origin, Purpose, and Leadership Model

Alpha Merit Badge University (AMBU) was created in Atlanta in 2023 as a practical response to an advancement equity gap. Many capable youth, especially Scouts in underserved communities, face barriers such as limited access to Merit Badge Counselors, transportation constraints, lack of parent familiarity with advancement systems, fewer STEM and career exposure opportunities, and limited access to mentors who can help them navigate the pathway from Scout to Eagle.

The AMBU model addresses those barriers by concentrating merit badge counseling, advancement support, family engagement, college exposure, service, and positive representation into a single high-energy event. It leverages Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.'s historic commitment to manly deeds, scholarship, and love for all mankind by creating a practical youth-development platform rooted in service, education, mentorship, leadership, and community uplift. At the same time, AMBU aligns with Scouting America's goals of character development, citizenship, personal fitness, outdoor learning, advancement, and service.

AMBU also serves as a visible and practical vehicle for implementing and sustaining the 2015 Memorandum of Understanding between Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. and the Boy Scouts of America, now Scouting America. The MOU established a shared commitment to expand Scouting opportunities, strengthen youth leadership, promote positive role models, and connect Alpha chapters with local Scouting councils. AMBU brings that partnership to life by giving chapters and councils a repeatable model for collaboration, volunteer engagement, merit badge instruction, family outreach, Scoutreach support, and advancement toward Eagle Scout rank.

AMBU is built around a simple but powerful premise: when Scouts can see accomplished adults, Alpha men, professionals, and Eagle Scouts who reflect their communities, their belief in their own advancement potential increases. The experience is intentionally designed to be more than a merit badge clinic; it is a leadership pipeline that turns access into advancement, advancement into confidence, and confidence into service.

- **Founder and national chair leadership:** Bro. Dr. Derek Smith initiated AMBU in Atlanta and has driven its growth into a replicable national model.
- **Chapter-based execution:** Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity alumni chapters can host local AMBUs in partnership with Scouting councils, colleges, churches, schools, and community organizations.
- **MOU implementation model:** AMBU provides a structured way for Alpha chapters and Scouting councils to activate the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity /BSA partnership through local programs, shared resources, council engagement, Scoutreach outreach, and measurable youth advancement outcomes.
- **Professional mentorship:** Merit Badge Counselors are recruited from fields such as law, medicine, engineering, technology, business, aviation, public safety, education, government, finance, and the arts.
- **Equity-centered access:** AMBU focuses on Scouts who might not otherwise have easy access to counselors, college campuses, mentors, career professionals, or structured advancement events.
- **Replicable operations:** The model uses event timelines, registration tools, prerequisites, volunteer recruitment templates, counselor guidance, communications, and post-event reporting to help new chapters launch successfully.

Program Model and Core Components

A successful AMBU event typically includes merit badge instruction, an opening ceremony, youth inspiration, family engagement, lunch, college or cultural exposure, and optional service. The model can be delivered as a one-day event or expanded into a multi-day based format where complex badges require more time.

This design mirrors the strengths highlighted in the Eagle Scout Study: youth benefit when advancement is connected to leadership practice, service, adult association, goal setting, and confidence-building. AMBU makes those elements visible in one place, so Scouts do not just hear that Eagle is possible - they spend the day surrounded by people and systems that help make it feel reachable (Scouting America, 2026).

Component	Purpose	Impact
Merit badge classes	Help Scouts complete or make significant progress on required and elective badges.	Accelerates advancement and builds confidence.
Professional MBCs	Connect Scouts to adults with deep career and life experience.	Expands career awareness and reinforces adult association.
Eagle Scout panels	Allow Scouts to hear honest stories from Eagle Scouts.	Builds motivation and makes Eagle rank feel attainable.
College/HBCU setting	Expose Scouts to campuses and Black excellence in higher education.	Promotes college readiness and aspiration.
Parent/adult leader workshops	Equip adults to support advancement, safety, recruiting, and counselor development.	Strengthens family and unit capacity.
Community service	Connects advancement to service and civic responsibility.	Reinforces the Scout Oath, Scout Law, and Alpha service values.
Local Council Partnership	Engage the local Scouting council as an active partner by providing event support, council visibility, resources, guidance, and an on-site presence such as a welcome address, information table, or staff participation.	Strengthens council alignment, supports registration and advancement processes, expands Scoutreach and community engagement, assists with marketing, and provides access to additional resources such as backup Merit Badge Counselors, unit support, and post-event reporting.

