

Guidebook & Indian Waters Council Supplement for Earning the



Doctorate of Commissioner Science Degree

and

Doctorate of Commissioner Science Knot Award



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The Doctorate of Commissioner Science is the most advanced degree a commissioner can earn, building on coursework of colleges of commissioner science, service to units, and a doctoral project.

The commissioner's doctoral project should have a direct, practical impact on unit service by requiring candidates to identify a real, validated need and develop an evidence-based response to address it. It should support unit service in a very practical, hands-on way. Candidates should look closely at what units really need, listen to leaders, and use that information to create solutions that make a difference. Rather than focusing on theory, the project helps improve how commissioners support units—whether that means more transparent communication, better tools, or stronger connections to resources. By putting these ideas into action and seeing what works, the project leads to meaningful improvements that help units run more smoothly and provide a better Scouting experience for youth and families. This guidebook is intended to assist both the candidate and their advisor as they plan, carry out, and document that work.

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Degree Requirements for the College of Commissioner Science

Prerequisite for ALL degrees includes:

- Current registration as a commissioner
- Current Scouting America Safeguarding Youth Training Certificate

Bachelor's Degree

Prerequisite for Bachelor's degree:

- Completion of a Commissioner Position-Specific Training Course

Course Requirements:

Completion of **seven (7)** courses of instruction, including at least **five (5)** from the National College of Commissioner Science curriculum at the bachelor's level. The remaining **two (2)** courses may be locally created, focusing on unit service.



Master's Degree

Master's Degree requirements:

- Completion of the Bachelor of Commissioner Science degree
- Earn the Arrowhead Honor

Course Requirements:

Completion of **seven (7)** additional courses of instruction (total of 14), including at least **five (5)** from the National College of Commissioner Science curriculum at the master's level. The remaining **two (2)** courses may be locally created, focusing on unit service. CED courses can also qualify.



Doctorate Degree

Doctorate Degree requirements:

- Completion of the Master of Commissioner Science degree
- Earn the Commissioner Key

Course Requirements:

Completion of **ten (10)** additional courses of instruction (total of 24), including at least **five (5)** courses from the National College of Commissioner Science curriculum at the doctorate level. The remaining **five (5)** courses may be locally created, focusing on unit service.

CED courses from the National College of Commissioner Science curriculum can also qualify.

University of Scouting courses conducted by local councils DO NOT meet degree requirements for any COLLEGE OF COMMISSIONER SCIENCE Degrees. Elective courses **may not** have been previously applied toward your bachelor's or master's degrees.

Doctoral Project:

The topic of a project needs to be related to unit service and the commissioner's primary registration – (district commissioner, assistant district commissioner, unit commissioner, roundtable commissioner, etc.). Each project is to be carried out by **an individual doctoral candidate (1 person)**. The topic must **be pre-approved** by the dean or designee of the College of Commissioner Science Doctorate program.

The Council Commissioner or designee may authorize an alternate topic if it is deemed appropriate.

The **finished** project must also be approved by the doctoral dean, project advisor, or designee.



Commissioner Performance:

Serve on a college of commissioner science staff (instructor or support staff), **OR** work with training support for commissioners for at least one year.

The award of the Doctorate Degree must be approved by the local council commissioner or designee.

College of Commissioner Science Course Requirements

Courses from the National College of Commissioner Science curriculum at all levels enhance commissioners' knowledge and performance. Course content is directed toward unit service rather than program areas. Therefore, courses offered at a local University of Scouting separate from the College of Commissioner Science **DO NOT** meet the requirements for **any** of the degrees in a College of Commissioner Science.

Questions should be directed to your council commissioner, college chancellor, doctoral dean, or project advisor. Courses must be from the national Scouting America curriculum, found at <https://www.scouting.org/commissioners/training/college-of-commissioner-science/> or they will not be accepted for credit.

Once-earned, credit for College of Commissioner Science courses may not be rescinded or removed from the participant, even if the course (or courses) has been retired from the national curriculum.

Reciprocity

Colleges of Commissioner Science will accept a commissioner's coursework from any Scouting America College of Commissioner Science, provided an official transcript listing all nationally approved curriculum courses and locally created courses taken is provided.

Degree Recognition

Colleges of Commissioner Science will recognize degrees earned from other Scouting America Colleges of Commissioner Science, provided that a degree certificate or transcript (pdf) is available.

Doctoral Project Advisor

Once you have decided to pursue the Doctorate of Commissioner Science degree, talk with the dean of your Council College of Commissioner Science (or their designee if there is not an appointed doctoral dean) or Council Commissioner. This person will pair you with an advisor for the process.

Your advisor will be someone who has already earned their doctorate. If problems arise, your advisor will provide the necessary assistance or help you find what you need.

It is good practice to share your work regularly with your advisor to stay focused on your topic.

Selecting and Limiting the Scope of Your Doctoral Project

The Doctoral Project

A project is typically recognized as an initiative that contributes to unit service **and represents the implementation of your ideas - what you plan to accomplish, along with a summary of how it was completed and the results you achieved.**

This means a project is something you plan and carry out to **support improvement, or assist a unit (or units)** in some way.

- **Project** = the work you choose to do
- **Initiative** = a purposeful action you undertake
- **Contributes to unit service** = helps commissioners better serve a unit (or units) or strengthens how the unit(s) function – does not have to be for a specific unit.

A doctoral project is a planned effort that requires you to plan, implement, lead, and facilitate, with an impact on unit service, beyond gathering information. The project report should be detailed enough to enable others to duplicate the project and explain the project outcome and the benefits provided.

Sometimes, a study of activities surrounding unit service or an analysis of some impact on unit service may be the preamble to your project. However, the research (study/analysis) does not replace the actions taken to improve unit service. The research, when necessary, is just the first step in determining **how** to improve unit service. **Your actions resulting from the study and the resulting report or summary are what make up the doctoral project.**

As noted above, it is recommended that the topic of a project be related to unit service and to the current commissioner position in which you are registered. There may be specific circumstances (very limited) under which a topic related to another area of Scouting would be appropriate. On the rare occasion, local council commissioners or designees have the authority to approve topics related to another area of Scouting when selecting one related to unit service isn't appropriate or practical.

Workbook Purpose and Usage

A workbook has been designed to help guide commissioners through the steps of a Doctoral Project as part of the Doctorate of Commissioner Science Degree program. The use of this workbook is optional; although the approvals/signatures indicated in this workbook are required to complete a project, these approvals may be obtained using forms other than this workbook.

Download: [Commissioner Doctoral Project Workbook-final Feb 2026](#)

Limiting the Scope

Here are some considerations to keep in mind when limiting the scope of your doctoral project.

- Is the issue you wish to improve or change within your role?
- Is there sufficient information to support the need for your project focus?
- Are there any financial implications for completing your project, and are they within your ability to manage?

- Does what you plan to do fall within the policies of Scouting America and your council?

One way to narrow/limit your topic would be to discuss with your advisor the use of SMART goals and how to apply them to your topic.

- Is your topic **Specific**?
- Is your topic **Measurable**?
- Is your topic **Attainable**?
- Is your topic **Relevant** to Unit Service?
- Is your topic **Time-Based**?

Applying the principles of a S.M.A.R.T. analysis to your topic will help you efficiently use your time and resources.

Approval of Your Doctoral Project

You will need to obtain approval to begin your doctoral project. Prepare and submit an overview of one to two pages with more details, if necessary, to the dean of the commissioner college doctoral program (or designee) with the following information:

- Your name and current commissioner position
- The working title of your project
- A brief paragraph describing the purpose of your project and why you chose that topic
- A proposed outline that you will use to write your project report once your project is complete

Download: [Suggested Doctoral Project Proposal](#)

Please note that your project should be related to unit service. If you have questions, discuss them with the dean or your advisor early. Once you have submitted your proposal, it will be reviewed to determine if the topic is appropriate, sufficiently focused, and worthwhile. The intent of the project is to improve some aspect (or aspects) of unit service.

Download: [Identify a Need in Unit Service and Focus for Your Doctoral Project Topic](#)

When deciding on your project, remember that it should be supported by your role in unit service and be within your purview to complete and control. If you are a unit commissioner or a district commissioner, you are most likely not in a position to carry out a council-wide project yourself.

The 3-Ps (Proposal, Project, Paper-report).

A project is typically recognized as an initiative that contributes to unit service and represents the implementation of your ideas - what you plan to accomplish, along with a summary of how it was completed and the results you achieved. Think of the 3-Ps (Proposal, Project, Paper-report).

PROPOSAL - Define the Need

The proposal identifies a specific unit service need and explains why it matters. Informed by research, observation, and stakeholder input, it establishes purpose, scope, and desired outcomes. This step ensures the topic is appropriate, focused, and aligned with strengthening unit service before moving forward.

PROJECT - Take Action

The project implements the approved proposal through intentional, measurable actions. Guided by data and collaboration, the commissioner implements the plan, monitors progress, and adapts as needed. This phase documents what was done, how it was done, and the direct impact on unit service.

PAPER - Demonstrate Impact

The paper analyzes and evaluates the entire process from proposal through project completion. It connects research to practice, examines outcomes, and reflects on lessons learned. The paper demonstrates effectiveness, supports conclusions with evidence, and offers recommendations to inform future commissioner service.

Doctoral Project Development

Project planning defines the project scope, objectives, and steps needed to complete the work. The output of the project planning process is a project management plan.

These basic planning steps can help you write a plan that's both realistic and on target.

- **Research and Preplanning:** Understanding the ins and outs of the project will help you determine the best process and identify any snags that might get in the way of success. Conduct your own research to dig deeper into your goals and outcomes, as well as any potential issues or risks.
- **Draft an outline:** Outline how the project should work. If you're at a loss for where to begin, start with the who, what, when, and how of the project.
- **Your plan should be able to answer** the following questions: What are you trying to deliver? How will you get there? Is there a deadline you have to meet?
- **Confirm your plan:** Now is the time to discuss your outline with your advisor to be sure that what you want to do will meet the requirements of the degree.
- **Execute your plan:** With your advisor's approval, carry out the project, making careful notes along the way as to what worked and what did not work. Did you have to make any changes to your plan?

Writing an Outline

Identify your topic. Decide what points you would like to address with your project. Put your points in logical, numerical order so that each point connects back to your main point. Connect your paragraphs.

Remember that your outline should serve as a rough idea of how your project will develop; it **does not have to be very formal** or exact.

Gathering Information

Research Sources

The development of specifics may involve library research, interviews, visits, or firsthand observations. You might research the literature to understand the topic better and inform decisions with established knowledge and best practices. This research helps clarify the issue, identify practical approaches, and avoid ineffective ones, while providing context and credibility. Combined with

interviews, visits, and firsthand observations, literature research supports well-reasoned conclusions and purposeful action.

Other sources could include internet research, surveys/questionnaires, and Scouting literature. When using the internet, be sure to visit official Scouting America websites to ensure the accuracy and timeliness of the information you receive.

Questionnaires and Interviews

An important part of using questionnaires and interviews is creating questions that can measure your target audience's opinions and experiences. You could Google "how to design a survey" or a similar question to research how to do something you seldom do.

Evaluate your survey questions to see whether the language you use predetermines the kinds of answers you receive. If you gather information based on ambiguous or biased questions, your data may not be very meaningful.

Identify the topics to cover in your questionnaire or interview, and arrange them in a logical order.

Once you have developed your questions, test them with several people to gauge responses and revise them as needed. Try to make your questions as open-ended as you can. Be sure to prepare clear, concise instructions for participants so they can complete your questionnaire easily. If you use a rating scale, avoid a middle-of-the-road response. Don't let respondents choose a response that is neither positive nor negative. Make them decide. The responses you get will be more meaningful.

When using statistics, ensure your sample size is valid, as more respondents generally increase reliability.

Take notes throughout the process and save all project materials to support accurate reporting in the final report.

Action Plan

The doctoral project action plan turns your ideas and research into clear, doable steps that improve unit service. Based on identified needs and feedback from unit leaders and commissioners, the plan outlines what will be done, why it matters, and how success will be measured. It assigns responsibilities, sets timelines, and focuses efforts on actions with the greatest impact.

By providing a simple roadmap from need to action, the plan helps ensure the project leads to fundamental, positive changes that strengthen commissioner support and help units better serve youth and families.

Preparing the Doctoral Project Report

After you have carried out your project, it's time to assemble your materials and write your report. Organize notes according to the outline you prepared. If you include diagrams, organize them in a logical order so that they build on each other and depict the story you are trying to tell. When using

factual material or others thoughts, be sure to give accurate, complete credit to the original author.

Organize Your Information

Analyze the results of your questionnaire and/or interviews, and organize the results and how you used them in your action plan. Then, develop a preliminary outline of how the project was implemented.

Action Plan Results

The purpose of a doctoral project is improvement in unit service as a result of your specific actions based on the information you have gathered about trends, needs, and possible solutions. You should be able to explain why your actions were necessary and what impact you expected them to have. You should be able to explain how you tracked and measured your progress and define success.

You may need to include appendices – tables of data you may have collected, information whose detail is not required in the body, but may prove helpful to other users, and so forth. The format of your appendices is not that important – **make sure that someone reading your work can find where you obtained your information.**

Sample Project Report Outline

- Title Page with a brief summary
- Table of Contents (*if desired*)
- Dedication (*if desired*)
- Project Description and Evaluation Criteria
- Actions taken
- Recommendations/Conclusions (Based on data presented)
- Attachments (**As required** - Copy of all lists, illustrations, tables, and charts)
- Listing of outside sources
- Glossary of terms (*If necessary*)
- Index (*If necessary*)

You can use this **or a similar** form to write your outline. Everyone organizes differently, so it is important to **do what works best for you.**

Write Your First Draft

Reading your report aloud will help you experience the words as others might and give you a more objective view of your work. It adds a precheck layer to your proofreading and can help you think more about whether the report makes sense. Saying it aloud makes it sound more real, which is your goal.

Review, Revise, Rewrite

In revising the first draft, ask yourself: Have I made my purpose/report clear? Are the project's major points supported? Is my style too wordy? What expressions or words can be eliminated? What parts need to be rewritten for greater clarity? Could someone use my procedure and report to reproduce the same actions?

Summarize or reemphasize the major point of your project and explain what conclusions you reached.

A handy guide for writing your final report is “The Language of Scouting”. It can be found here: <https://www.scouting.org/scoutsource/Media/LOS.aspx>.

Download: [Checklist for Editing Doctorate Project Reports](#)

Ask someone to proofread your work and make suggestions for improvement. Plan a meeting with your advisor to discuss your work and revise as necessary.

Project Submission Guidelines

The project is intended to improve some aspect of unit service. A project report may vary somewhat in form depending on its purpose.

The project report should be accompanied by your Doctorate of Commissioner Science Personal Progress Record when submitted to your advisor or the dean of the doctoral track of the college.

Download: [Doctorate of Commissioner Science Personal Knot Tracking Record](#)

Once you have submitted your report, it will be reviewed by the council’s doctoral review designee or committee, who will determine if your project and resulting paper follow your originally proposed outline and meet the goals as previously approved.

NOTE: The candidate should address questions/concerns regarding the organization or completion of the paper in meeting the original goals of the project, *BUT the doctoral candidate is **NOT required to “defend” their project or paper.** The project was previously approved, and the report summarizes the work performed and the conclusions/recommendations/outcomes.*

Doctoral Review Committee (OPTIONAL)

A committee review ensures consistency is maintained, that the project summary is accurate, and personal biases are not part of the process. The committee should include the local council commissioner, college chancellor or dean of doctoral studies, and, if desired, two additional commissioners who have earned their doctorate. It should consist of no more than five individuals.

The committee is not empowered to change the project once it is approved; however, the committee may request clarification in the report.

Each council should have a paper or digital library or repository. Following acceptance of the project report, the printed or electronic copy will become the property of the council’s college of commissioner science, be placed in the college’s document library with proper recognition noted, and made available to all commissioners as a reference for future use.

The Doctor of Commissioner Science certificate and the Doctor of Commissioner Science knot are two separate recognitions and will be conferred as the requirements for each recognition are met.

Presentation of the recognitions will be at the discretion of the college dean and the degree recipient.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: Some commissioners attend colleges of commissioner science at different councils to earn their degrees. The doctorate degree, as it relates to the doctoral project, is specific to each council and includes national requirements for appropriate courses.

The candidate's council commissioner (or designee) must approve the project, sign the candidate's forms, and provide an appropriate venue to confer the Doctorate Degree and/or Knot Award.

The doctoral project must be completed in the same council that awards the degree once earned. A doctoral degree, once awarded, must be recognized by other councils.

Doctorate of Commissioner Science Knot Award

NOTE: The completion of the Doctorate of Commissioner Science degree does not automatically qualify a commissioner for this award. All requirements below must be met. There are two additional unique requirements to earn this award: tenure and recruitment.

Prerequisites:

- Current registration as a commissioner
- Current Scouting America Safeguarding Youth Training Certificate
- Completion of the Doctorate of Commissioner Science degree



Tenure:

Serve as a commissioner for a minimum of 5 years. (Years need not be consecutive).
This service can be in one or more positions as a commissioner.

Recruiting:

Recruit or assist in recruiting at least three new commissioners during their tenure as a commissioner.

The award of the Doctorate of Commissioner Science Knot must be approved by the council commissioner or designee.

Download: [Doctorate of Commissioner Science Knot Award-fillable](#)

Questions

Should you have questions and/or need further information, please use the link below to contact the Commissioner Training/College of Commissioner Science Team.

[College of Commissioner Science | Scouting America](#)

Indian Waters Council Supplement to the Guidebook for Earning the Doctorate of Commissioner Science Degree

This brief supplement was created to provide you, the person seeking to complete a Project, with some help with the Guidebook. It also establishes what the Indian Waters Council approach is to completing this work, specifically as it applies to the final approval of the paper by the Doctoral Review Committee.

The Guidebook for Earning the Doctorate of Commissioner Science Degree and Doctorate of Commissioner Science Knot Award, or simply the Guidebook, is a very detailed guide to completing the Doctorate of Commissioner Science degree and the Doctorate of Commissioner Science Knot Award. (They are *not* the same thing!) Following the Guidebook will make the process much more manageable and will help you through the roughest parts of the process.

The Guidebook takes a logical approach of stepping through earning the award. This Supplement will follow the Guidebook closely. If something is not addressed here, it's simply because it's so clearly called out in the Guidebook that there didn't seem to be a reason to go over it again.

Project Advisor

This section is clear, but this is just a reminder. Having an advisor from the beginning of the process will help you get through it in a much more straightforward way. Your advisor can help you through the process of defining your effort. Rely on them! The Advisor's Guidebook is also here on the Commissioner Corner. It will provide details concerning the Candidate's working relationship with the Advisor. It's well worth a review by anybody working on a Project, and his or her advisor.

Degree Requirements for the College of Commissioner Science

Just a reminder that courses you take outside of the Commissioner College program will likely not count toward a degree. This is explicitly called out by the Guidebook, in that classes taken at Scouting U (for example) will not be used for this program.

Doctorate of Commissioner Science Degree

In Indian Waters Council, the Doctoral Review Committee will review the proposed effort and approve or disapprove it. When you are putting your ideas together for your project, you'll need have them approved by the Doctoral Review Committee. Following that review, the Advisor to the Council Commissioner, a professional, must also approve the proposal. This will help ensure that you are on firm footing in terms of the topic.

Prerequisites for a Doctorate

The Progress Record for the Doctorate of Commissioner Science Knot addresses the prerequisites for earning the various degrees. The prerequisites are as follows:

Bachelor of Commissioner Science Degree

- Current registration as a commissioner while completing all requirements
- Current BSA Youth Protection Training certificate
- Complete Commissioner Basic Training Course including Onboarding

Master of Commissioner Science Degree

- Current registration as a commissioner

- Current BSA Youth Protection Training certificate
- Completion of Bachelor of Commissioner Science degree
- Earn the Arrowhead Honor

Doctorate of Commissioner Science Degree

- Current registration as a commissioner
- Current BSA Youth Protection Training Certificate
- Completion of Master of Commissioner Science degree
- Earn the Commissioner's Key

Doctorate of Commissioner Science Knot Award

Although the Guidebook mentions it, it is important to reiterate that earning the Doctorate of Commissioner degree does not qualify one for the Knot Award. The requirements for the Knot Award are called out separately and are more challenging. See the Doctorate of Commissioner Science Knot Personal Progress Record.

Selecting and Limiting the Scope of Your Doctoral Project

This can't be stressed too much: You don't want to try to boil the ocean! With your advisor, select a topic that will help unit service. You will want to identify a topic that is related to unit service. The Guidebook mentions the use of SMART goals in defining the topic of your paper. It's a good idea, and will you keep what you're doing focused.

Writing an Outline

Whether you've worked on lengthy papers in the past or not, starting with an outline will help you focus on what each section should be. There are sample outlines available in the Guidebook. Yes, you can deviate from those, but they are a great place to start! As a bonus, if you are using a word processing tool like Microsoft Word, creating your headings early will also auto-generate things like your table of contents. It's both a time saver and reduces the editing time by ensuring accuracy.

Research Sources

You can use almost any credible resource for a source. As with any good academic effort, you'll want to give credit to the original authors from which you got the information. There are several different formats for how you will want to cite these references, but the important part is making sure that you give the original author the credit they deserve. If you're using somebody else's words, put them in quotes. It ensures that you won't be thought to have plagiarized the work.

Questionnaires and Interviews

If you are planning to use questionnaires or interviews as part of your project, it will always be in your best interest to have your questions reviewed by somebody who may not be familiar with your material. You may be so familiar with your material that you know what you're trying to ask—those questions may prove to be confusing for somebody else. This step will save you some pain when it comes to putting your materials together.

If you use the Internet as a resource, understand that it can have its limitations. The Internet is typically not reviewed by a third party, so the information you get may be highly skewed or totally inaccurate! Only use credible sites that provide accurate and complete information.

Group Projects

While not specifically called out in the Guidebook, National has provided guidance concerning the requirement to work on a project by yourself. As with other single-person efforts, such as Eagle Projects and Wood Badge Tickets, this effort is only worked on by one person. An update to the Guidebook is forthcoming.

Doctoral Review Committee

The Indian Waters Council (IWC) Doctoral Review Committee will be the body that considers your project. They will consider the content and the value of the paper. It's possible that the paper may be sent back for additional information or clarification. This paper should be complete and accurate; it should just be considered part of the process and not a personal attack on your paper.

As a reminder, if a member of the Doctoral Review Committee is your Project Advisor, they cannot be part of the review for your paper. Your paper will be submitted to the Dean, who will then distribute the paper for review by the Committee. Upon completion, the paper will become the property of the council's college of commissioner science and be placed in the college's document library and with proper recognition made available to all commissioners as a reference for future use.