

# TROOP PROGRAM PLANNING

## Yearly Program Planning

**In recent research the Boy Scouts of America determined that inadequately planned and executed troop meetings were the No. 1 cause of boys leaving Scouting.** The troop operations plan, introduced in 1989, addressed some of the issues dealing with "boring troop meetings" by adding

- a new Scout patrol, to assist new Scouts in becoming comfortable in the troop environment and in learning basic Scout skills, which make up their principal program at troop meetings. Delivery of skills instruction was segmented according to a Scout's knowledge and abilities.
- an older boy program, to provide challenging experiences for Scouts, age 13 and older.

The challenge now is to help leaders and Scouts implement these ingredients to create a successful troop program.

Planning a troop program on an annual and a monthly basis is a new task for many leaders. Good planning and execution depend on

1. a Scoutmaster who understands the process,
2. trained junior leaders who can not only plan meetings but successfully execute them,
3. sufficient personnel in the form of assistant Scoutmasters, troop committee members, and parents, and
4. a troop of knowledgeable, informed parents.

Your first step in planning is to utilize the resources available to set goals for the troop. The next step is to train your junior leaders in the planning process. Then give them the responsibility and authority to plan and implement the troop program. The final step is to get your troop committee and parents to "buy in" to support this "boy-planned" program.

## The Annual Planning Process

The Scouting program year begins in September, so you should start troop planning during the summer. There are five basic steps in the annual process.

1. **Do your homework.**
2. **Get patrol input.**
3. **Conduct the annual troop program planning conference.**
4. **Obtain troop committee support.**
5. **Inform everyone.**

## **STEP 1: Do Your Homework**

As Scoutmaster, you are the "advance" person. You need to check out and pull together certain things before your troop's annual planning conference. Neither difficult nor time-consuming, these tasks, listed below, make a lot of sense, because they pay off in a smoother, more effective conference, and they result in a better annual plan.

1. Gather district, council, community, and chartered organization dates for events that will affect the troop.

Begin by picking up a calendar of key school dates from the local school. Check with the local chamber of commerce for dates of community activities. Don't forget to get dates of key chartered organization activities. Personal dates, such as anniversaries or birthdays, also may affect troop activities, so be sure to include those.

During the summer, be sure to attend the annual council or district program planning conference. This is where you will be able to get the council and district calendar, as well as information on activities, training courses, summer camp, etc.

Now put all these dates on one calendar, to share with the troop committee and to use at the unit program planning conference.

2. Review the resources needed to plan the annual program.

Pull together your Scouting library. The items needed to plan your troop program include: Troop Program Planning Kit, Woods Wisdom, Troop Program Features, issues of Boys' Life and Scouting magazines, program feature supplements from Scouting magazine, The Scoutmaster Handbook, The Boy Scout Handbook, and the Junior Leader Handbook.

3. Review the advancement status of each Scout.

Use the Troop/Team Record Book to do this. Look carefully for basic skills needed by your Scouts, and also for key merit badges that should be introduced through the troop program.

4. List some goals for the troop.

Take a look at successful areas from last year's program, like the number of Scouts who made First Class or the super Good Turn you did for your chartered organization. You probably will want to continue those things, but also consider some other challenges to address during the coming year. The list could get lengthy, so you may have to prioritize your choices, selecting only a few challenges for this year. After all, there is always next year. Here are some areas to consider:

- National Quality Unit Award
- National Camping Award
- Service project or Good Turn
- Summer camp
- Special weekend events
- Troop membership
- Troop equipment
- Advancement

5. Review the program features available to the troop.

Using the troop planning worksheet, list your suggestions for a program feature for each month of the coming year. Be sure to keep in mind the troop goals and advancement status of your Scouts. Share the list of program features with the senior patrol leader prior to presenting them to the patrol leaders' council. (Hint: List your program feature suggestions in pencil to emphasize that input is also expected from the senior patrol leader.)

6. Meet with the troop committee to review the calendar and potential troop goals.

Share the calendar with the committee to ensure you haven't missed any important dates. Many committee members will be involved in troop activities, so they will want you to note any conflicts in their personal calendars.

Review the goals you have set for the troop. Now is the time the troop committee "buys in" to its role in making your troop successful. They will have a lot of discussion and some compromise, but the result will be a set of troop goals to which everyone feels committed.

Remember, these goals will not be finalized until after the junior leaders have also "bought in" at their annual planning conference.

7. Meet with your senior patrol leader to plan the next steps leading to the annual troop program planning conference.

This can be time consuming and you may need more than one session. If so, devote the second **meeting with the senior** patrol leader to the sole task of mapping out the agenda for the troop planning conference.

You and the senior patrol leader should cover the following items at your meeting:

\_\_\_ Review the Troop Program Planning video (parts II and III) and workbook in the Troop Program Planning Kit.

\_\_\_ Review the steps to planning an annual troop program.

- \_\_\_ Review the calendar for any missing items.
  
- \_\_\_ Discuss troop goals. Allow the senior patrol leader to have input; the only way to achieve the troop's objectives will be with the help of everyone.
  
- \_\_\_ Review the resources needed to plan the troop program. Discuss the program features suggested for the coming year.
  
- \_\_\_ Discuss what major events and activities the troop might do during the coming year.
  
- \_\_\_ Record these recommendations onto the troop planning worksheet for presentation to the patrol leaders' council.
  
- \_\_\_ Discuss the presentation of this information at the patrol readers' council meeting and the role of patrol leaders in the planning process.
  
- \_\_\_ Set a date for the annual troop program planning conference.
  
- \_\_\_ Review the agenda and preparation needed to conduct the conference.

## **STEP 2: Get Patrol Input**

This second step in the annual planning process is where the senior patrol leader takes charge. At the next patrol leaders' council meeting, the senior patrol leader introduces the suggested annual troop plan. The patrol leaders need to understand that this is only a proposed program. The final program will be developed and voted on at the annual troop program planning conference.

Each patrol leader is asked to review this plan with his patrol members at the next troop meeting. The patrol leader should seek ideas from his patrol on what proposed programs they like or dislike and what additional programs they might be interested in.

The senior patrol leader then announces the date of the planning conference. He should briefly review the agenda and make assignments for physical arrangements, meals, etc.

## **STEP 3: Conduct the Annual Program Planning Conference**

This is the step where your troop program comes alive. The success of this conference began when you, the Scoutmaster prepared your senior patrol leader. Be alert throughout the conference to help out the senior patrol leader. Don't wait for him to fail, but be careful not to take over for him. Careful, non-intrusive coaching will help your senior patrol leader build confidence. Share your leadership with him.

*Who attends the conference?* The troop's annual planning conference is attended by the Scoutmaster, assistant Scoutmaster for the new-Scout patrol, assistant Scoutmaster for the Venture crew, senior patrol leader, assistant senior patrol leader, patrol leaders, crew chief, and troop guide.

*Physical arrangements.* Careful planning should ensure that this planning conference is a firstclass experience for your junior leaders. Pick a location that would be special to your Scouts, possibly one offering opportunities for other activities, such as swimming, boating, etc. You can make it a weekend experience, although the conference is easily completed in a day.

Whichever you do, don't involve the junior leaders in a lot of housekeeping chores that distract them from the primary purpose of planning the troop program. Consider using other troop adults to cook and clean up, so your patrol leaders' council can concentrate on the task at hand.

Make sure the facilities are suited for a conference. Is ventilation good? Is there sufficient lighting? Is there Electricity for a TV monitor and VCR? Are the chairs comfortable? Are there tables to work on? Is there a way to hang calendars on the wall? Use the checklist on page INTRO 6 to make sure your facilities will work.

Setting up the conference facility should have been previously assigned to members of the patrol leaders' council. A checkup by the senior patrol leader prior to the conference ensures that nothing is forgotten.

Follow the agenda. When directing a session, your senior patrol leader needs to be alert that it's easy to get sidetracked. If the group starts to drift away from the agenda, a gentle nudge from you may be in order to put them back on course.

### **Remember the conference ground rules:**

1. The senior patrol leader presides.
2. Each event and program is voted on.
3. The majority rules

### **STEP 4: Obtain Troop Committee Support**

At the completion of the annual troop program planning conference, you and your senior patrol leader should prepare a clean draft of the planning worksheet for presentation to the troop committee. Arrange with the committee chairman for this important topic to be placed on the meeting agenda. Then you and the senior patrol leader present the troop's annual program to the committee.

Try to anticipate questions and prepare your senior patrol leader to answer them. (Remember, it's a boy planned program.) The critical question the committee must resolve is: Does the troop have the resources to carry out this program? If not, can the resources be obtained, and are the troop members willing to do their share in obtaining them?

There may be need for compromise. In those cases, the senior patrol leader should present the options to the patrol leaders' council for their approval.

The finished product from these discussions will be a troop program that is accepted by everyone, and one that has the necessary support to make it work.

### **STEP 5: Inform Everyone**

Now that you have a great troop program planned, don't keep it a secret, share it with everyone.

The best way to do it is at a parents' night program. Have some good fun and fellowship, and then share the troop's plan for the year. Let the Scouts announce the plan, but let the troop committee talk about what kinds of help will be needed from parents to make the program work.

This is the final phase of the "buy-in" talked about earlier. Here is where you get those extra hands for the garage sale, transportation for outings, and maybe even a consultant for the new Venture program.

Ask a computer whiz in the troop to design an original troop calendar on MicroSoft's OUTLOOK. Give everyone a copy. (If it is nice enough, troop families may use it to record all their family activities.)

Don't stop the sharing at the troop level. Make sure the chartered organization and your unit commissioner have a copy of your troop's plans. Develop a news article for the local newspaper, highlighting the special activities the troop has planned for the coming year. Some potential Scouting parent might read it and be inspired to join your troop.

## **Planning the Monthly Troop Program**

Developing an annual plan is really just the first step in planning the troop program. On a quarterly basis, the patrol leaders' council should review the annual plan and make any adjustments necessary to ensure the smooth implementation of all programs. These quarterly checkpoints are also important because some programs require more than a month to plan.

As a part of the annual program planning conference, you are asked to plan the next month's troop program. Even if your troop is very experienced, this session should be used to teach your junior leaders to use *Woods Wisdom*, *Troop Program Features* or the program features in *Scouting* magazine. Once they are comfortable in using these, you can give them the option of adding flexibility to the program. But be careful too much departure from the suggested troop meeting activities could result in less exciting meetings and poor advancement.

Each *Woods Wisdom* or *Scouting* magazine program feature provides detailed information on four weekly meetings, a monthly highlight activity, advancement requirements that can be satisfied, and some good skills suggestions.

Activities incorporating all basic and intermediate skills your Scouts need for the monthly program are interwoven into each weekly meeting. Detailed use of program features will ensure regular advancement of your Scouts and provide troop meetings that are fun and exciting, *not* dull and boring.

## Your Program Assistants

Besides offering their readers entertaining, well written fare, *Boys' Life* and *Scouting* magazines support the nationally suggested Boy Scout program features. In each monthly issue, *Boys' Life* provides ideas and inspiration to boy readers about how they can enjoy the BSA suggested program for the following month. *Scouting* provides adult leaders similar tools to strengthen the BSA program with special articles of packs and troops that have used the monthly program feature successfully.

In addition, five of the six issues of *Scouting* contain a total of twelve segments called "Troop Program Features." They represent one-third of the thirty-six monthly features found in the larger book titled *Woods Wisdom, Troop Program Features*, No. 34251. Another program tool, *Boy Scout Leader Program Notebook*, is a pocket-size publication that contains space to jot down ideas and plans for troop activities. It is available at your BSA local council service center.

Segments of "Troop Program Features" will be bound into issues of *Scouting* according to this schedule:

<b>Issue of Scouting</b>	<b>Program Feature</b>	<b>Suggested month for troop program</b>
May-June 1996	Introduction and Sports	September 1996
	Engineering	October 1996
September 1996	High Adventure	November 1996
	Tracking	December 1996
Nov.-Dec. 1996	Hobbies	January 1997
	Public Service	February 1997
Jan.-Feb. 1997	Cultural Awareness	March 1997
	Wildlife Management	April 1997
Mar-April 1997	Camping	May 1997
	Emergency Preparedness	June 1997
	Health Care	July 1997
	Boating/Canoeing	August 1997

*From Scouting magazine, Scoutmaster's Program Features*



## **Appendix A**

### **ANNUAL TROOP PROGRAM PLANNING CONFERENCE AGENDA**

*(Note: No time limits have been placed on the agenda, but working sessions should last no longer than forty-five minutes without a break.)*

#### **I. OPENING ACTIVITY Scoutmaster**

As a teambuilding activity use the "all aboard." This helps foster a spirit of working together to solve a common problem.

#### **II. REVIEW CONFERENCE SENIOR PATROL LEADER GROUND RULES**

##### **A. Write down the conference objectives:**

1. To decide on troop goals for the coming year
2. To develop a program that represents ideas from the entire troop

##### **B. Review ground rules:**

1. The senior patrol leader presides.
2. Each event and program will be voted on.
3. The majority rules.

#### **III. SHOW TROOP PROGRAM PLANNING VIDEO, PART 1**

#### **IV. DEVELOP TROOP GOALS SCOUTMASTER**

A. The Scoutmaster leads a discussion on goals for the coming year. These could deal with such topics as advancement, service, or troop money earning. (These are the same goals discussed earlier with the troop committee and senior patrol leader.)

B. The patrol leaders' council votes to approve the goals.

#### **V. CONSIDER MAJOR SENIOR PATROL LEADER EVENTS**

A Review dates for items such as these:

1. Scouting shows

2. Camporees
3. Summer camp
4. Special troop events
5. Good Turn
6. Patrol suggestions for special activities

B. Vote on events. (Delete from the calendar any activities the troop will not participate in.)

C. Insert events on the troop planning worksheet.

D. Backdate necessary preparation time for each event.

#### VI. GAME BREAK

#### VII. DISCUSS PATROL SUGGESTIONS FOR PROGRAM FEATURES

A. Discuss the program features suggested for the coming year.

B. Will they meet the goals of the troop?

C. What are the advancement opportunities?

D. Decide where they best fit into the calendar.

E. Vote on the final list of program features.

F. Insert the approved features into the troop planning worksheet.

#### VIII. LUNCH OR GAME BREAK

#### IX. SCHEDULE SPECIAL TROOP ACTIVITIES

A. Decide on a schedule for the following:

1. Board of review
2. Courts of honor
3. Recruitment night(s)
4. Webelos Scout graduation

B. Add these dates to the planning worksheet.

#### X. FINALIZE THE PLANNING WORKSHEET

A. Put the Troop Program Planning Worksheet into final form for presentation to the troop committee.

#### XI. GAME BREAK

#### XII. MONTHLY PROGRAM PLANNING

A. Show Part III of the video from the Troop Program Planning Kit.

B. Plan next month's program.

#### XIII. SCOUTMASTER'S MINUTE

## Appendix B

### ANNUAL TROOP PROGRAM PLANNING CONFERENCE CHECKLIST

#### LITERATURE

- \_ *Woods Wisdom, Troop Program Features*, No. 34251
- \_ *The Scoutmaster Handbook*, No. 33002
- \_ *The Boy Scout Handbook*, No. 33229
- \_ *Junior Leader Handbook*, No. 33500
- \_ Program features from *Scouting* magazine
- \_ *Scouting* magazines
- \_ *Boys' Life* magazines
- \_ Troop Program Planning Worksheet
- \_ District/council calendar
- \_ School calendar
- \_ Chartered organization calendar
- \_ Community calendar
- \_ Information on council and district events
- \_ Complete copy of next month's program feature, for the final part of the workshop (one per participant)
- \_ Troop Resource Surveys completed by parents and troop leadership
- \_ *Troop/Team Record Book*, No. 34510
- \_ Troop Advancement Chart, No. 34506

#### PROGRAM SUPPLIES

- \_ "All aboard" activity (supplies needed)
- \_ Game (supplies needed)

- \_ Flip chart stand and pad (s)
- \_ Twelve large calendar pages
- \_ Felt-tip or Dry Erase markers
- \_ Writing pads for participants
- \_ Pens or pencils
- \_ Thumbtacks
- \_ Masking tape
- \_ VCR and monitor
- \_ Extension cord

### **FOOD/REFRESHMENTS**

- \_ Refreshments for morning and afternoon breaks
- \_ Additional food (lunch, etc.)

### **CONFERENCE FACILITY SETUP**

- \_ Tables set in horseshoe or square, depending on number of people
- \_ VCR and monitor located for easy viewing
- \_ Flip chart stand placed for easy viewing and use
- \_ Calendar pages hung on wall
- \_ Troop Program Planning Worksheet hung at front center of room
- \_ Table at front of room for resource material

### **CONFERENCE ASSIGNMENTS**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Develop menus and purchase food.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Food preparation and cleanup.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Gather supplies (see checklist).

\_\_\_\_\_ Set up conference facility.

\_\_\_\_\_ Prepare large blank calendars with months, days, and known dates.

\_\_\_\_\_ Prepare flip chart with conference objectives and ground rules.

\_\_\_\_\_ Prepare Troop Planning Worksheet with correct months.