



ANNUAL PROGRAM PLANNING CONFERENCE

A successful troop meeting begins with advance planning. In recent research, the Boy Scouts of America determined that inadequately planned and executed troop meetings were the number one cause of boys leaving Scouting.

Troop meetings should focus on a monthly program feature, be fast-moving, and start and end on time. The program feature should be interwoven with the program at all experience levels: the new-Scout patrol, experienced patrols, and the Venture patrol.

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 youth leaders who can plan meetings and successfully execute them, (3) sufficient personnel in the form of assistant Scoutmasters and troop committee members, and (4) parents who are knowledgeable and informed.

Your first step in planning is to utilize the resources available to set goals for the troop. The next step is to train your youth 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 “Scout-planned” program.

The program planning guide in chapter 8 of the Scoutmaster Handbook will guide you through the basics of planning, from doing your homework to securing parental support for your program. The monthly troop program features found in Scouting magazine are the other principal resources needed to run the program planning workshop.

In addition, enhance the troop meeting by using games, Scoutmaster’s Minutes, ceremonies, and other support materials from the Troop Program Resources for Scout Troops and Varsity Teams, No. 33588.



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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.

STEP 1: DO YOUR HOMEWORK

As Scoutmaster, you serve as the “advance” person. You check out and pull together certain things before your troop’s annual planning conference. Neither difficult nor time-consuming, the 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 obtain 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 for 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 Features (Volume I, No. 33110; Volume II, No. 33111; Volume III, No. 33112); issues of Boys’ Life and Scouting magazines; program feature supplements from Scouting magazine; the Scoutmaster Handbook, No. 33009; the Boy Scout Handbook, No. 33105; the Patrol Leader Handbook, No. 32502; Senior Patrol Leader Handbook, No. 32501; and Troop Program Resources for Scout Troops and Varsity Teams, No. 33588.

3. Review the advancement status of each Scout.

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.



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After all, there is always next year. Here are some areas to consider:

- Journey to Excellence
- National Outdoor Challenge Award
- Service project or Good Turn
- Summer camp
- Special weekend events
- Troop membership growth
- Troop equipment
- Advancement

5. Review the program features available to the troop.

Using the Troop Program Planning Chart, 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. There will be 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 youth leaders have also "bought in" at their annual planning conference.



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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 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 everyone's help.
- _____ 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 on the Troop Program Planning Chart for presentation to the patrol leaders' council.
- _____ Discuss the presentation of this information at the patrol leaders' 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, nonintrusive coaching will help your SPL build confidence. Share your leadership with him.



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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 patrol, senior patrol leader, assistant senior patrol leader, patrol leaders, and troop guide.

Physical arrangements. Careful planning should ensure that this planning conference is a first-class experience for your youth 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 youth 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; let your patrol leaders' council concentrate on the task at hand.

Make sure the facilities are suited for a conference. Is ventilation good? Is there sufficient lighting? 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 9 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 should be aware 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 Troop Program Planning Chart 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 Scout-planned program.) The critical question the committee must resolve is: Does the troop have the



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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 these resources?

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

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

STEP 5: DISTRIBUTE INFORMATION

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 Venturing.

Ask a computer whiz in the troop to design an original troop calendar. 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 youth leaders to use the troop program features found 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.)



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Each 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 woven 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.



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ANNUAL PROGRAM PLANNING CONFERENCE AGENDA

(Note: No time limits have been placed on the agenda, but working sessions should last no longer than 45 minutes without a break.)

- I. **OPENING ACTIVITY, SCOUTMASTER**
Conduct All Aboard or other team-building activity. This helps foster a spirit of working together to solve a common problem.

- II. **REVIEW CONFERENCE GROUND RULES, SENIOR PATROL LEADER**
 - 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 is voted on.
 3. The majority rules.

- III. **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.

- IV. **CONSIDER MAJOR EVENTS, SENIOR PATROL LEADER**
 - 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 Program Planning Chart.
 - D. Backdate necessary preparation time for each event.

- V. **GAME BREAK**



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VI. 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 program features best fit into the calendar.
- E. Vote on the final list of program features.
- F. Insert the approved features into the Troop Program Planning Chart.

VII. LUNCH OR GAME BREAK

VIII. 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 Troop Program Planning Chart.

IX. FINALIZE THE TROOP PLANNING WORKSHEET

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

X. GAME BREAK

XI. MONTHLY PROGRAM PLANNING

Plan next month's program.

XII. SCOUTMASTER'S MINUTE



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ANNUAL TROOP PROGRAM PLANNING CONFERENCE CHECKLIST

Literature

- Troop Program Features, Volume I, No. 33110
- Troop Program Features, Volume II, No. 33111
- Troop Program Features, Volume III, No. 33112
- Troop Program Resources for Scout Troops and Varsity Teams, No. 33588
- Scoutmaster Handbook, No. 33009
- Boy Scout Handbook, No. 33105
- Patrol Leader Handbook, No. 32502
- Senior Patrol Leader Handbook, No. 32501
- Program features from Scouting magazine
- Scouting magazines
- Boys' Life magazines
- Troop Program Planning Chart
- 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 markers
- Writing pads for participants
- Pens or pencils
- Thumbtacks
- Masking tape
- Extension cord



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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
- Flip-chart stand placed for easy viewing and use
- Calendar pages hung on wall
- Troop Program Planning Chart hung at front center of room
- Table at front of room for resource material

Conference Assignments

- _____ Develop menus and purchase food.
- _____ Prepare food and clean up.
- _____ 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 Program Planning Chart with correct months