The Annual Troop Program Planning Conference

The troop program planning conference offers the patrol leaders' council the opportunity to draw up an effective, exciting course of action. The conference is organized and conducted by the senior patrol leader with the help of the Scoutmaster.

There is no set time of the year to conduct the conference, though many troops prefer late summer after the troop has returned from summer camp. Set the date well in advance so that all members of the patrol leaders' council can clear their schedules to attend. The conference should be in a setting that is free of distractions—a remote cabin or campsite can be ideal. The essential business of the conference usually can be conducted in one day, though the workload can be spread out over two days with an evening of camping in between. The pace of the conference should be relaxed and informal.

Preparing for and conducting a troop program planning conference involves a five-step process:

Step 1: Do Your Homework

This step should be done jointly by the senior patrol leader and the Scoutmaster well in advance of the planning conference:

1. Evaluate last year's troop annual plan, if there is one. Ask your troop leadership for data collected from the Troop Resources Survey.

2. Gather key district and council dates such as camporees and summer camp.

3. Gather dates of community functions, key school events and activities, holidays, and special events of the chartered organization. Also include personal dates that may affect the troop's activities, such as the Scoutmaster's anniversary cruise.

4. Review the advancement status of the troop members and decide what kinds of activities are needed to help each Scout progress.

5. Write down the priorities the senior patrol leader feels are most important for the troop. These could include summer camp, high-adventure activities, advancement goals, Journey to Excellence, service projects, and fund-raising events. With all this information, begin a general outline of next year's program.

Step 2: Get Patrol Input

At a monthly patrol leaders' council meeting, present the list of priorities the senior patrol leader and the Scoutmaster have developed, and explore the range of options he believes are available to the troop. For example, the senior patrol leader might feel that the needs of the troop can be best achieved by adopting any of the selected program features available from the BSA *Program Features for Troops, Teams, and Crews,* volumes 1, 2, and 3, Nos. 33110, 33111, and 33112.

Paring down those possibilities to a dozen—one for each month—will be easier to do after patrol leaders have shared the list with patrol members and gotten their thoughts on the features that most interest them. Remind patrol leaders to bring their patrols' recommendations to the program planning conference.

Step 3: Hold the Troop Program Planning Conference

The troop's planning conference is an opportunity for members of the patrol leaders' council to map out the troop's activities for the year and for the troop's adult leaders to offer guidance and support. In consultation with the Scoutmaster, set a time and a place for the conference and invite the following persons to attend:

In an active role:

- Senior patrol leader
- Assistant senior patrol leader
- All patrol leaders
- Troop guide

The troop scribe may be invited to the conference to keep a log of the proceedings. However, he is not a voting member of the conference.

In a supportive role:

- Scoutmaster
- Assistant Scoutmasters
- Junior assistant Scoutmasters
- Any other individuals who might be helpful, such as other adult troop leaders, the chartered organization representative, your unit commissioner, and parents (However, to keep the planning conference as purposeful and efficient as possible, you should invite only those who actively and regularly engage in troop activities and decision-making.)

Open the conference with a team-building activity or an action game that will promote cooperation among the participants.

ANNUAL TROOP PROGRAM PLANNING CONFERENCE AGENDA

The intent of the annual troop program planning conference is fourfold:

- Develop troop goals for the coming year.
- Select the major events for the coming year.
- Select the program features for the coming year.
- Fill out the troop's calendar for the coming year.

Develop Troop Goals

The Scoutmaster leads a discussion that guides the group in developing a list of the goals they want to see the troop achieve in the next 12 months. The Scoutmaster may present a list of goals and then encourage the group to expand upon them or adjust the list to better fit the needs of troop members.

By majority vote the patrol leaders' council approves the troop goals.

Select the Major Events

With the Scoutmaster's assistance, the senior patrol leader reviews potential major events for the troop—summer camp, Scout shows, etc. These events may be entered on a calendar and photocopied for everyone's information.

Invite patrol leaders to share input resulting from the patrols' discussions of the proposed major events for the troop. Be sure to consider the preparation time required for each event and how that will affect the troop's calendar.

Open the floor for discussion of any or all of the proposed events. Encourage input from every conference participant.

Decide by a majority vote whether to include each major event on the troop's annual calendar. Enter the elected items on the Troop Program Planning Chart, available online at http://www.scouting.org/magazines/BoysLifePromo.aspx.

Select the Program Features

With the Scoutmaster's help, the senior patrol leader presents the list of potential monthly program features.

Open the floor to discuss each of the program features. Consider the following questions:

• Will the program feature help the troop meet its goals?

• What opportunities for advancement does it present?

• Where would the feature best fit into the annual calendar?

Vote on the list of program features.

Fill Out the Troop's Calendar

Using the Troop Program Planning Chart, develop the troop's calendar by writing the following items in their appropriate spots:

• Monthly program features

• Boards of review

• Courts of honor

• Recruitment nights

• Webelos Scout transition

• Any other troop activities that can be scheduled this far in advance

• Service project for the chartered organization

Lead the group in a review of the Troop Program Planning Chart. Once the group has approved the final edition of the plan, it will be ready to present to the troop committee for its input and approval.

Plan the troop program for the upcoming month.

Close the troop's annual program planning conference by inviting the Scoutmaster to offer a Scoutmaster's Minute.

Step 4: Consult With the Troop Committee and the Chartered Organization

The senior patrol leader and the Scoutmaster should present the plan to the troop committee and the chartered organization representative and ask for their support. If revisions are suggested, the senior patrol leader must take the plan back to the patrol leaders' council for changes to be made and approved.

Step 5: Announce the Plan

Distribute copies of the final plan to troop members, families, members of the troop committee, and representatives of the chartered organization. Copies of the plan also should be given to the Cub Scout pack leaders, Venturing crew leaders, unit commissioners, the district executive, the head and secretary of the chartered organization, and the building custodian.