View a videocast filmed at the 2013 BSA National Annual Meeting of a presentation based on the contents of this publication and presented by members of the National Advancement Committee. The video, "On Increasing Advancement," can be accessed through scouting.org/advancement. It is divided into seven segments to simplify downloading and reviewing.



On Increasing Advancement











On Increasing Advancement

Introduction

A comprehensive plan for increasing the rate of advancement as measured by the Journey to Excellence should include a number of approaches. By bringing these together, we can address the issue at its root, support programs rich in advancement opportunities, and also promote improved data entry.

Such a plan can lead to increases in advancement through

- · A general increase in volunteerism
- Far-reaching unit service
- · Fully functioning advancement committees
- · Promotion and reinforcement of procedural compliance
- · Purposeful management
- · Increased reporting and proper data entry

A General Increase in Volunteerism

A major barrier to achievement in the Journey to Excellence is a lack of volunteers. Typically, as unit service improves, increases in advancement follow. Thus, shortages in roundtable staff, trainers, unit commissioners, and other volunteers who provide direct service to units have the greatest potential to impede rank achievement. To effectively contribute, district subcommittees must build the capacity to assist units directly. At the same time, councils and districts must maintain strength in all the operating functions in order to facilitate service to units. In most councils, this suggests a universal need for enormous growth in volunteerism.

Meeting those needs requires a purposeful and well-planned approach to recruitment. The process must begin with proper treatment and recognition of volunteers currently in place. It continues with thoughtful identification of new prospects, selection of those best qualified to serve, and implementation of recruitment strategies that maximize positive responses. In councils with significant volunteerism gaps, a campaign atmosphere with checkpoints and goals can produce more significant results.

Of the steps toward improving volunteerism, informal studies indicate the greatest weakness may be in prospecting. It seems most councils have volunteers who understand how to recruit but that many struggle with *whom* to recruit. The proper use and promotion of Friendstorming on Tour is a proven method of generating large numbers of prospects for district and council volunteer service.

Friendstorming on Tour has been used successfully in many councils across the nation as a prospecting "best method" with the potential of surfacing large numbers of prospective volunteers for service at the district level. When implemented as described in the publication Friendstorming on Tour, No. 510-003, a tour "stop" at an average district has generated 100 or more prospects. Actual results, of course, vary depending upon current district and council circumstances, the time of year the "tour" is conducted, and how closely a council follows the plan. A link to Friendstorming on Tour can be found at scouting.org/advancement.

Far-Reaching Unit Service

Truly notable increases in advancement will be due to far-reaching unit service. As units receive assistance, more will reach that program quality threshold where advancement can flourish, and unit leadership can be trained to plan activities rich in advancement opportunities.

A three-pronged approach can produce the necessary results:

- · Extend at least some level of service to all units
- Extend at least some level of training to all units
- Institute dramatic improvements to roundtables

Extending Service

A fully functioning commissioner staff is, of course, the key; however, commissioners should not be the sole unit service providers. The district subcommittees play a role as well, with each developing the strength and volunteer capacity to provide some level of ongoing specialized direct service.

There is no argument that commissioner service is best provided through personal visits to meetings of the unit and its committee. However, this level of support is not always practical. If we limit ourselves to only those prospects for commissioner service who have time to attend many meetings, and also possess the tenure and experience we normally seek, it is entirely possible we will exhaust the qualified prospect pool before we are able to extend service to all units. We say a commissioner should be a "friend" to units, and also a "representative," "teacher," "counselor," and "unit doctor." When councils are unable to find enough people who can be all of these, it becomes advisable to recruit those who can simply begin as "friends," and then perhaps grow in their role as representative, teacher, and so forth. If there are not enough commissioners to visit every unit, then rather than forsake the uncovered units we must recruit people who will at least keep in touch over the phone and through electronic communications.

In the *Administration of Commissioner Service*, No. 34501, a commissioner's priorities are explained as based on the role of helping units succeed. However, many commissioners fall into the trap of doing everything *except* their appointed responsibilities related to unit service. Because of the many programs offered in Scouting, they find themselves promoting projects, carrying messages, acting as judges, running Friends of Scouting campaigns, and performing other such tasks. While these endeavors are unquestionably important, they are not the primary responsibilities of unit commissioners. Cooperation with other Scouters is expected, but commissioners should leave the leadership for council or district events to others.

The purpose of unit service is to help units succeed. And success is attained when units move steadily toward completing the criteria for the Journey to Excellence. Unit commissioners should never feel that "all is well" simply because they have casually made their contacts since the last report meeting.

The responsibilities of a commissioner are described in the *Commissioner Fieldbook for Unit Service*, No. 33621, which is available at http://www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/33621.pdf. *The Administration of Commissioner Service*, No. 34501, is available at http://www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/34501.pdf.

Extending Training

Though regularly scheduled training at central locations is important, it should be considered part of a wider "portfolio." Even if training is well promoted and well done, not everyone will attend. It behooves us, therefore, to build out the council and district volunteer trainer corps so sessions can be taken afield to units and presented at their convenience. Although this addition to the "portfolio" will provide a significant increase, *still* not everyone will attend.

Some people simply don't have the time—or the patience—to attend courses. In these cases we must remember our purpose is not merely to present training but to improve the ability of leaders to deliver quality programs. Engaging those who will not attend regularly scheduled training or even special sessions presented locally for individual units calls for a flexible approach. There is nothing wrong with informal gatherings facilitated by knowledgeable Scouters who set aside the formal syllabus and simply discuss solutions to specific problems and best practices in carrying out Scouting roles.

Improving Roundtables

Consider roundtables. If they are well staffed, they have the potential to present programs worth the time invested. Volunteers will attend them if the value they receive is worth at least the value of the time spent getting there, enjoying the meeting, and returning home.

In too many cases, however, we urge attendance at roundtables even if they are of such poor quality that they drive people away. Roundtables unable to offer a worthwhile volunteer time investment should be suspended and action taken to staff them properly with trained and committed volunteers. Once the meetings are worth taking the time to attend, an entertaining "Roundtable Grand Reopening" event, complete with refreshments, dignitaries from the council, and so forth, could be held.

The level of roundtable staffing represents the most important factor for success. This does not mean a quality roundtable cannot be presented by a small staff. It just must be handled differently. A small staff may take advantage of attendees' experience for facilitating table discussions, while a large staff may be able to fully implement the Cub Scout or the Boy Scout roundtable planning guides.

Fully Functioning Advancement Committees

An advancement committee must do more than administer to the Eagle Scout rank. Each year less than 2 percent of total traditional members achieve this milestone. Committees that provide service to the remaining 98 percent will have a great deal more influence on the rate of advancement.

The *Guide to Advancement*, section 3, lists the possible responsibilities for council and district advancement committees and for unit advancement coordinators. The following list for council chairs is representative of the effort that can lead to increases in advancement:

- 1. Inspire a positive working relationship between council and district advancement committees.
- 2. Present advancement conferences and training experiences that will strengthen performance of district and unit advancement volunteers.
- 3. Support advancement elements in events and activities presented by other council committees.
- 4. Support outdoor programs where advancement takes place: day camps, resident camp, long-term camping experiences, and specialized activities involving advancement.
- 5. Promote efforts in councils and districts to educate Cub Scout parents about the workings of the advancement program.
- 6. See to an effective merit badge program with sufficient counselors to meet demand.
- 7. Establish and nurture a culture of reporting advancement over the Internet.
- 8. Promote and reinforce compliance with procedures set forth in the *Guide to Advancement*. This can increase the rate of advancement by discouraging unauthorized additions to requirements and procedures. See "Promotion and Reinforcement of Procedural Compliance," below.

To accomplish the above, as well as the other responsibilities suggested in the *Guide to Advancement*, most councils will need to strengthen their advancement committees. This can be done through the use of Friendstorming on Tour and other best practices related to volunteer recruiting. *In the Guide to Advancement*, topic 3.0.0.5, "Building an Advancement Committee," offers a list of 12 key council advancement committee positions, with each member taking a different role in order to cover all the responsibilities. Watch for the "Advancement Committee Mechanics" feature in *Advancement News* for more articles on the suggested organization and responsibilities of advancement committee members.

For an advancement committee to "fully function" requires the orientation and training of its members. The same is true for unit advancement coordinators. The *Guide to Advancement* should serve as the source book for these efforts, and the National Advancement Committee has produced a number of webinars to support this work. These can be found under "Advancement Educational Presentations" at scouting.org/advancement. Additionally, advancement administrators at the unit, district, council, area, and regional levels should subscribe to *Advancement News* to keep up to date with interpretations, philosophy, and rationale, and to learn what is coming in the future. This can be done by sending an email to advancement.team@scouting.org with "SUBSCRIBE" in the subject line.

An important resource: Go to scouting.org/advancement and click on "Advancement Educational Presentations" to find a number of presentations that can prove invaluable in helping advancement volunteers understand how to fulfill their responsibilities.

Promotion and Reinforcement of Procedural Compliance

Encourage district and council advancement committees to consider how their decisions might contribute to the rate of advancement. The key is to facilitate and promote a program in which every member advances at a strong rate. Too often decisions result, perhaps unintentionally, in impeding or even preventing rank advancement.

Advancement is a carefully designed method—one of eight—used to achieve the aims and mission of the BSA. It provides challenging hurdles, but they are surmountable. When leaders add or intensify requirements, they raise these to an unintended level. This means fewer youth will clear them. These unnecessary—and unauthorized—barriers tend to decrease the rate of advancement, which then affects retention, membership, and thus mission achievement. See "Unnecessary Barriers" in the October 2011 issue of *Advancement News*. The practice of adding requirements or procedures to those put forth by the BSA represents the most important reason for promoting procedural compliance.

Other common violations of national procedure can be solved through the following practices:

- Consistent and appropriate methods for handling Eagle Scout issues, such as approving service project proposals, collecting references, and conducting boards of review.
- Establishment of local council practices for adhering to national advancement procedures at outdoor programs, summer camp, and events such as merit badge fairs or midways.
- Familiarization and compliance with procedures concerning appeals, time extensions, special needs cases, and alternative requirements

Advancement volunteers who understand national procedures and related local council practices are more likely to make the connection between advancement and retention, and thus provide a higher level of contribution to increases in advancement.

Purposeful Management

Increased volunteerism and unit service will foster higher quality programs. As this occurs, more units will reach the point where advancement is well facilitated and supported. Then the dynamics of the improvement cycle can begin—where advancement leads to retention, which allows better programs, which in turn again furthers advancement. A fully functioning advancement committee dedicated to fostering rank achievement can move the cycle to a new level as it assists leaders in building a stronger connection between advancement and the specific unit programs that best support it.

The Scout executive and key council leadership should play the role of sustaining focus. Depending on local circumstances, this can be done in a number of ways. The list here is meant to provoke thought.

- At meetings and conferences with staff or advancement committee members, include discussions on best practices and success stories regarding improving the rate of advancement.
- Promote subscriptions to *Advancement News* in order to generate a broader understanding of national advancement procedures and best practices.
- Recognize commissioners and advancement committee members whose efforts have caused individual units to show gains in advancement.
- Establish advancement-oriented goals or objectives. Possibilities might include:
 - Increase active membership on the council or district advancement committee such that all programs
 are covered and direct service to selected units can be provided. (This can be measured through the
 number of active and registered advancement committee members and representation of the Cub
 Scout, Boy Scout, Varsity Scout, Venturing, and Sea Scout programs.)
 - Prepare an executable action plan for increasing advancement that includes fulfillment of responsibilities for committees as outlined in the *Guide to Advancement*, section 3 (measured through an executable plan, approved-by date, and percentage increase in advancement).

- Provide regular advancement training or orientation for advancement committees or unit advancement coordinators (measured through the number of advancement volunteers attending).
- Increase the number of units with at least one registered advancement coordinator (measured through the number of units with registered advancement coordinators).
- Establish regular communications with unit advancement coordinators (measured through development and delivery of a regular e-newsletter.)
- Create a promotional plan to assist pack advancement coordinators in educating parents, pack leadership, and pack committee members in ways to stimulate and encourage advancement (measured through an executable plan approved with verification through survey results).
- Increase the incidence of entering data through Internet Advancement (measured through a decrease in the number of advancement reports entered by the council).

Increased Reporting and Proper Data Entry

Increased Reporting

In order to efficiently conduct targeted efforts that will increase the rate of advancement, a relatively high level of accuracy must be achieved in advancement data. This means promoting advancement reporting. Statistics suggest Cub Scouting is the place to begin. Nationally, the percentage of Cub Scouts who advanced at least one rank grew from 47.7 percent to 60.1 percent, or 12.4 percent, from 2009 through 2013, whereas the gain in Boy Scout advancement was only 4.7 percent.

It is highly likely this represents the beginnings of increased reporting in response to the Journey to Excellence, with the greater increase in Cub Scouting indicating a wider gap between what was reported and what was actually earned. It is therefore probable that relative to Boy Scouting, Cub Scout advancement remains underreported. See the related article under "The Cub Scout Angle" in the November 2011 *Advancement News*.

Proper Data Entry

There are two methods for advancement data entry that assure both the district advancement report *and* the council's Journey to Excellence dashboard are properly updated.

- Use Internet Advancement (must be accessed through Internet Explorer).
- Enter rank advancement to a Scout's individual member record through Record Achievements in ScoutNET.

Other methods of entry will update either the district advancement report or the JTE dashboard, but not both. See the November 2011 issue of *Advancement News* for a related article in the feature "On Increasing Advancement."

