



Establishing Support to Exploring Units

By Jeff Schweiger, assistant council commissioner for Exploring, National Capital Area Council

Exploring began as a senior program in early Boy Scout troops. In 1935, senior Scouts were called Explorers for the first time. In 1949, Exploring was revised to include senior Scouts still in troops, separate units called “posts” with an emphasis on outdoor activities, Sea Scout ships, and Air Scout squadrons. In the 1960s, career education posts were added to the Exploring program. In 1998, the posts with traditional Scouting activities were split off from Exploring and became the Venturing program. The remaining Explorer posts moved under the umbrella of Learning for Life, an affiliate of the Boy Scouts of America. Explorer posts continued to be administered by local BSA councils through Learning for Life and Exploring committees and the professional staff. Service was provided by the professional staff and by volunteer Exploring Service Teams.

Chief Scout Executive Mike Surbaugh’s renewed emphasis on growing the Exploring program has resulted in the need to provide service to these units. Where resources permit, the preferred approach is for the dedicated Exploring Service Team model to be utilized. Where this is not feasible, service to Explorer posts and clubs may be provided by utilizing current council and district structures and resources, much as unit service to traditional Scouting units is currently provided.

The National Capital Area Council (NCAC), while having a significant Exploring program, does not have an established Exploring Service Team. Unit service and support has been provided by the professional staff. In 2014, enhancement of the Exploring program, with a particular emphasis on unit service, was made part of the NCAC five-year strategic plan and an Exploring Key 3 was established. This Exploring Key 3 initially was composed of the deputy Scout executive, the vice president for Exploring, and a new commissioner position, the assistant council commissioner for Exploring. As the implementation of the plan progressed, the Exploring staff advisor replaced the deputy Scout executive, and the position of vice president for Exploring moved under the vice president for membership, consistent with the regional and area structure, and the position renamed to Exploring committee chair. Due to the lack of existing Exploring Service Teams, NCAC expanded commissioner service to Exploring units and proceeded with a model of integrating posts and clubs into the districts, the same as traditional units.

There are three basic steps to establishing support to Exploring units using the existing commissioner staff approach:

1. Develop initial governance.
2. Draft a strategic plan.
3. Implement the strategic plan with continuous feedback.
 - Monitor progress and amend as needed.

The third step can be broken down as follows:

- Enhance the service from the council to the Explorer posts and clubs.
 - Train and prepare commissioner staff for support of Exploring program.
 - Establish council-level quality activities to engage all Explorer posts and clubs in order to increase positive perception of service from the council and affiliation with the Exploring program.
- Enhance marketing and sales to improve retention, renewal, and growth.
- Enhance the council’s capacity and capabilities to support Exploring.

The training sub-bullet can be further expanded as:

- Provide Explorer basic training for all council- and district-level commissioners to educate them on the similarities and differences of Exploring and the support needed.
- Prepare an Explorer post renewal handbook to assist existing posts. (The local NCAC handbook is available [here](#).)
- Revise three-party new-unit agreement to include Explorer posts and clubs. (The form that NCAC uses is available [here](#).)
- Include Journey to Excellence for Explorer posts in the commissioner–post relationship to increase awareness of the program and opportunities for improvement.
- Recruit past Exploring Advisors, Explorers, and others with a strong affinity and understanding of the program to serve as commissioners and advocates of the program. They will serve as a voice for the program at traditional Scouting meetings and gatherings. This step is viewed as being critical to helping the commissioners get engaged with Exploring as rapidly as possible.



NCAC has made significant progress establishing service to Exploring units through the district commissioner staffs:

- All districts with Exploring units have assigned commissioners to service those units.
 - Exceptions: One district has only a single Explorer club, which is serviced by the district executive. In the U.S. Virgin Islands District (recently added to NCAC), where we are still organizing the district commissioner staff, the district executive supports the two Exploring units there.
- Commissioners provide unit service similar to traditional units:
 - Annual Exploring unit registration renewal (Note: This is a different, though similar, process from that used by traditional Scouting units.)
 - Journey to Excellence
 - Making contact with units and capturing their strength and needs
 - Linking unit needs to district operating committee resources
- An Exploring service module is included in Commissioner Basic Training and addressed in district commissioner and assistant district commissioner training.
- An Exploring service elective is included in the master's track of the College of Commissioner Science.
- Online Exploring Service Team training modules are now available at my.Scouting.org (Scouting U), and an orientation module specific to unit commissioners servicing Exploring units is under development and should be available this spring.
- Commissioner Tools is scheduled to provide Exploring support in early 2017. In the interim, NCAC has developed local Explorer Service Tools with limited functionality. See <http://www.ncacbsa.org/exploringtools>.

NCAC began its initiative as a proof of concept. It has evolved into an effective means of providing service to post and clubs. When Explorer posts and clubs are included in Commissioner Tools, we will have completed the people, process, and technology transformation of Exploring unit service.

