

Winter 2021

THE COMMISSIONER

A PUBLICATION FOR COMMISSIONERS AND PROFESSIONALS

www.scouting.org/commissioners



The Power and Resilience of Scouting in a Time of Change

The preservation of the mission of the Boy Scouts of America is a goal that unites all of us. We often talk about how we can best preserve the mission and, in the face of change, how we will grow our program. Perhaps it is an appropriate moment to pause and read the mission statement again:

The mission of the Boy Scouts of America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law.

It is a powerful and simple statement. In times of rapid change, our mission statement reminds us of a number of constants in a world where few constants seem to remain in place. The values of the Scout Oath and Law are constants by which millions of young people and adults lead their daily lives. These values do not change. The need to prepare our young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes does not change. Indeed, in times of rapid societal challenge, the imperative to grow our platform to instill the mission in the next generation is our rallying cry. Whether volunteer or professional, youth or adult, whether you serve at the critical unit service or some other level of support, we all share a common mission to serve the next generation of Scouts.

In the last number of months, I have witnessed time and again the fundamental power and resilience of the Scouting program. It is our common recognition of the fundamental power to positively change lives that provides the foundation for our path forward. It is the resilience of the movement that provides the energy and drive to accomplish the next steps. I find resolve in the millions of smiling faces from our shared Scout trail. We have the opportunity to demonstrate to the nation our strength, resilience, and resolve, as we work together to continue the mission of Scouting.

What is the clarion call for how we support Scouting at this moment in time? Simply put, we must keep our focus and work together to support our local units. While our methods might change, our fundamental role in supporting local units never changes. Our actions ensure that we deliver quality program to America's families every day.



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Thanks for all you do for Scouting. As a Scouting family, we understand in our soul the magic of the Scouting movement and our ability to impact the future.

Scott Sorrels
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Change Is A Matter Of Perspective

We seldom see change at the pace we experienced in 2020. In hindsight, the pace wasn't surprising given the sources. COVID-19 alone drove dramatic change in every aspect of our lives; added to it were challenges that had been building within our movement for years and demanded different perspectives. Perhaps the pace of change will slow, but at least within Scouting, it will remain significant for a while longer.

Change isn't new to unit service — or to Scouting. Think back:

- Commissioner recruiting was always done in person.
- Position-specific basic training was always done in person; we believed personal interaction was essential to effective learning.
- Our College of Commissioner Science events were weekend-long and held in a camp setting; here, too, we believed personal interaction was essential to effective learning and that a weekend retreat was needed to form and maintain our team.
- Commissioners visited units — usually unit meetings — and remained observers at the back of the room who never took notes and seldom shared their observations with unit leaders.
- A commissioner service plan defined success: completion of a series of generic monthly tasks to be completed throughout the year.
- Unit service was done on paper.
- Wood Badge was a 6-day training experience set in the outdoors focused on 11 leadership skills.
- Scouts were boys; most leaders were males.

There have been dramatic changes in these and other areas. Those who have joined Scouting more recently accept (and prefer) online training for the basics and streamlined face-to-face opportunities for more advanced subjects. Commissioners make contacts — in a variety of settings — and focus on developing relationships based on candor, respect, and trust with unit leaders. This allows for identification of unit strengths and needs and the development of customized unit service plans to ensure that every member of the BSA has a great Scouting experience. Our technology isn't perfect, but today we can work and share information more quickly and efficiently. Today's Wood Badge participants are as excited about their experience as those who attended earlier versions. This month, we're celebrating the first class of female Eagles.

So what?

Those who have been Scouting for a while know that every one of those changes — and many others — were met with significant resistance.



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Some things remain constant: first and foremost, the values of our Oath and Law and mission.

Every change in Scouting hasn't been perfect. But more often than not, when our volunteers and professionals have worked together collaboratively — and we've broken out of organizational silos — real progress has been made and our service to youth (and their families) has improved.

As we look to our future, let's do so with optimism and a willingness to support carefully considered change. Our movement must grow. To do so, it must be responsive to the changing expectations of the youth and families it serves, ensure the safety of its youth members, and remove barriers to joining and participating in Scouting. Be prepared for change; be prepared for growth!

On the uptrail...



What Is Unit Service?

Unit service is about just one thing: helping units better serve more kids through Scouting. Effective unit service has an impact in three areas critical to Scouting's success:

- Retention — Commissioners have responsibility for three elements of retention that are essential to serving youth through Scouting:
 - Retention of units
 - Retention of youth and adult members
 - Retention of commissioners
- Growth — To grow Scouting, commissioners must support:
 - Growth in the number of units
 - Growth in youth membership
 - Growth in adult membership
 - Growth in the number of trained, engaged commissioners
 - Increased diversity

- Being a unit leader's single, best resource for answers to:

- Who?
- What?
- When?
- Where?
- Why?
- How?

Commissioners don't need an immediate answer to every question they are asked; candidly communicating that some research is necessary, completing it, and providing unit leaders the answer in a timely manner helps build relationships based on respect, candor, and trust ... and those types of relationships are essential for effective unit service.

Throughout this issue, members of your service team will offer their thoughts on how commissioners can support retention and growth and serve as a unit leader's single best resource.

What Is Unit Service?

Unit service. It has many names. We call it "meaningful contacts," "charter renewal," "roundtables," "unit service plans," and more. We spend untold hours analyzing it, surveying it, charting it, and promoting it. Unit service is, at the same time, simple and complex.

But unit service never seems easy. Instead, despite our best efforts, it always seems to elude us. Just when we think we understand it or are making progress in achieving it, we look at a graph or statistic and realize we still don't have it. It is frustrating in that way. It humbles and confounds the most successful men and women. Often, it seems to be just beyond our reach.

Perhaps we are trying too hard. Perhaps we want to define that which is undefined, attempting to categorize our service so we can somehow measure and track our efforts. But unit service isn't neatly confined, easily defined, or even simply measured. The fact is that it doesn't always have to be measured and it doesn't have to be tracked. When we look deeply into it, really spend time pondering it, we quickly realize unit service is more abstract, more a thing of the heart than the mind.

In reality, unit service is the notion that ONE dedicated BSA volunteer from outside the unit will care about the unit. He or she will care about the unit's delivery of a better Scouting experience. He or she will care about the Scouts in the unit.

In whatever form it takes or by whatever name we can call it, unit service is the idea that this one Scouter's care and concern manifests itself in countless acts of selfless service, such as finding answers, chasing down resources, sharing practices that have worked elsewhere, learning and then



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teaching, sharing thoughts or passions, listening to concerns or enduring gripes, quietly supporting from the back of the room, being in attendance for the Scouts' proudest moments, or praising the unit leaders, and more and more...

What is unit service? It's someone who cares about the unit.
What is unit service? It's one servant leader, one unit.



Communication Is the Backbone of Unit Service

We need communication with units and within the commissioner corps to achieve our objectives. Communication with units is an integral part of each of the commissioner objectives.

- **Supporting unit growth and retention through Journey to Excellence.** Journey to Excellence is a good tool for units to use for self-assessment. How can we support our units if we do not know how they are doing? Communication involves listening carefully to all that is said and noticing what isn't said. How closely do you listen during a Journey to Excellence discussion when the unit leaders say, "We have an annual plan"? Do you follow up and ask for details or just check the box that they have a plan?
- **Making meaningful unit contacts that capture in Commissioner Tools their strengths, needs, and a unit service plan that enables continuing improvement.** Are you having a collaborative discussion on the unit's strengths and weaknesses? Are you mentoring the unit leaders in a way that they can identify their issues without you telling them what the issues are or what the answers are?
- **Linking unit needs to district operating committee and other resources.** When a need is identified, do you share the contact information from a district resource so they can get the answers they need?
- **Supporting timely unit, district, and council charter renewals.** Do you communicate with the unit four months prior to when renewals are due regarding the tasks needed for recharter and when to have them completed? Do you have follow-up conversations throughout the recharter window?
- **Supporting unit leaders by delivering effective roundtables that provide program ideas, relationship development, and timely communication.** Do you discuss both the what and why of roundtable? What is on the agenda is a good start, but addressing why your unit should attend roundtable is better. The best thing you can share is what is in it (attending roundtable) for me.

In addition, we need broad communication regarding the health of each unit. Does your council commissioner know the current health of every unit in your council?

The easiest way to communicate to those who need to know is via Commissioner Tools. If you don't use Commissioner Tools, how do you let the council commissioner and other Scouts know about the unit's health? Can your assistant district commissioner, district commissioner, and district professionals describe the current health of every unit you're assigned to based on the information you have shared?

Here are some scenarios for you to consider. How well would your council commissioner understand unit health in each situation?

- What do we know about a unit's health if no contact is entered in Commissioner Tools?
- What do we know about a unit's health if you only email your assistant district commissioner or district commissioner?
- Do assistant district commissioners and district commissioners enter a contact on behalf of the commissioner who communicated to them what was learned (but did not enter it in Commissioner Tools) or do



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they create reports for the council commissioner so this knowledge is available?

- What do we know about a unit's health if only a score is entered?
- What do we know about a unit's health when the comment is general, such as "things going well, staying level" or "met with unit at meeting"?
- What actions do district commissioners take to learn the health of a unit when this information is not available in Commissioner Tools and not emailed to them so that they know the health of EVERY unit in their district?

2020 was a challenging year, and we learned that we cannot do unit service on autopilot. For example, units that were meeting in person in March suddenly found themselves unable to meet in person in April. As a result, information needs changed. Did your communication keep up with the challenges throughout the year? Did your council commissioner know the answers to the following questions throughout 2020?

- Is the unit meeting in person, virtually, or not at all?
- Do they plan to attend summer camp, or are they are prevented by their state or local health department, council, or chartered org from going to camp?
- Have they recruited any new Scouts or do they have a plan in place to recruit more Scouts?
- What issues did they need help with and what was done to help them?

Urgent Care: If a unit is facing a significant issue, do you communicate the issues "up the ladder" directly and quickly to your assistant district commissioner and/or district commissioner?

From a communication standpoint, the quality and depth of information that is communicated in Commissioner Tools is paramount.



What Is Unit Service From a Technological Perspective?

The title of this article leads a person to question the underlying motivation for our behaviors: “Is our technology driving our unit service?” or “Is our unit service driving our technology?”

About this time in 2020, I once again found myself devoting countless hours on email and the phone communicating with administrative commissioners across the BSA who were concerned that their contacts as measured in **Commissioner Tools** did not match what the **Journey to Excellence** dashboards and reports were providing. For those who are curious about the details, the JTE system and Commissioner Tools did not measure contacts the same. Commissioner Tools measures based on the actual month and year, which facilitates the way most commissioners operate (on a calendar month). JTE measures based on the accounting end of the month/year, which is calculated in a way that we could not automate ... which typically is the first Friday of the following month.

Unfortunately, the issue of Commissioner Tools/JTE unit contact data mismatching had become a time-consuming annual exercise; it even had the attention of TWO assistant Chief Scout Executives! Thus, when the JTE team suspended JTE for districts and councils last summer, I had a certain amount of relief. NOW (I thought) we could focus our efforts on the service we provide to units and de-emphasize the “bean counting” aspects that logging contacts in Commissioner Tools had become. This is not to say that logging contacts in Commissioner Tools is not important — it still is — but the logging of contacts should be supporting our service to our units, and not the other way around.

The Technology Team continues to work on your behalf to improve BSA technology, whether it is as simple as resolving a new bug that a user reported using the forums <https://discussions.scouting.org/c/MyST/COMMISS-TOOLS/3539> or



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making enhancements such as the new features that allow a commissioner to see a unit's advancements and activities from within Commissioner Tools. (The involved steps are: In Commissioner Tools, go to the “Contacts” tab, select the unit in question, click on the “Print” button, and then select the desired report or charter to be printed. See the screenshot.)

Potomac 02

A screenshot of the Commissioner Tools interface for Potomac 02. The left sidebar shows the "Contacts" tab selected. The main area displays a table of units with columns for Program, Gender, Unit Number, Chartered Orga, Last Contact, Last Contact Score, and Change in Score. A "Print" button is highlighted in the top right of the table, and a dropdown menu shows options for "Activity Summary Report", "Advancement Report", and "Charter".

Program	Gender	Unit Number	Chartered Orga	Last Contact	Last Contact Score	Change in Score
	F	Pack 0002	Second Baptist	2020-10-16	3.5	0.6
	B	Pack 0010	Lavale United Methodist Church	2020-02-20	3	1.1
	B	Pack 0024	Farrady Post 24 American Legion	2019-12-05	4.1	0.9
	B	Pack 0027	Keyser Moose Lodge #662	2020-11-07	4.5	0.7
	F	Pack 0029	Ridgeley VFW Gold Star Post 6452	2020-11-12	3.5	0.1



As we are hopefully all aware by now, in 2020 the national service center had to curtail direct support of BSA technology systems for volunteers, even for things as simple as resetting a password. Therefore, the local councils found themselves to be the “lifeline” for volunteers who need technical help. For many councils, taking on this new role is challenging, but this is an opportunity for technically savvy commissioners. If you consider yourself above average in your knowledge of BSA’s computer applications, you might want to offer to help your council provide direct service to volunteers who need technical help. You don’t need to be an expert in computers, and certainly you don’t need to be a computer programmer.

Personally, I believe the commissioner’s role with respect to helping their units with technology is to be a coach, helping the unit when they are stuck with technology. Thus, having at least a bare minimum knowledge of BSA technology as a commissioner is helpful when providing unit service — but not essential. I do NOT think that to function as a commissioner, individuals need to be experts in BSA technology, nor so technologically proficient that they can fill the role of computer application instructor or personal tutor, even including Scoutbook.

As we begin 2021, I am optimistic that our motivation as commissioners for using all our technological tools will be to increase the quantity and quality of our unit service.

What Is Unit Service?

This is a common question. The Commissioner Development Team is focused on equipping commissioners to be able to answer this question and build the skills needed to execute unit service.

- The training continuum for commissioners has been in place for some time:
- Basic training for each commissioner role — instruction and onboarding
- The College of Commissioner Science offers three levels of degrees (bachelor’s, master’s, and doctorate) plus continuing education courses
- Lifelong learning – national-level training events; local council and district training events; etc.

While the continuum is consistent, the content is regularly updated. Several of the basic training courses are being updated in 2021.

There is an article in this newsletter about upcoming updates and changes to the College of Commissioner Science curriculum.

There is an article in this newsletter that discusses the portfolio of national-level training events: weeklong conferences, impact sessions, and virtual impact sessions. Each of these events provides opportunities to dive into topics that are of interest to the commissioner, and many help to answer the question above.



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Each of us needs to own our personal development! What will you do in the next 90 days to ensure that you are equipped to help units?



College of Commissioner Science Curriculum Update

The Curriculum Review Team spent 2020 getting fully staffed, developing operating processes, and beginning the work of updating the College of Commissioner Science curriculum. This team also completed an evaluation of the national offerings and made some changes.

Bachelor's Courses

All of the bachelor's courses have been updated and can be found here <https://www.scouting.org/commissioners/training/college-of-commissioner-science/bachelors-courses/>.

These new courses reflect the changes related to the roundtable bachelor's degree noted below.

Bachelor's Course Archives

To recognize that planning might already be underway for many local councils, previous courses will be retained for a period of 120 days following publication of updates. The archives can be found here <https://www.scouting.org/commissioners/training/college-of-commissioner-science-curriculum-archive/archived-bachelors-courses/>.

Master's Courses

Updated master's courses will be available in April 2021 <https://www.scouting.org/commissioners/training/college-of-commissioner-science/masters-courses/>.

These new courses will reflect the changes related to the roundtable master's degree noted below.

Master's Course Archives

To recognize that planning might already be underway for many local councils, previous courses will be retained for a period of 120 days following publication of updates. The archives will be published here <https://www.scouting.org/commissioners/training/college-of-commissioner-science-curriculum-archive/archived-masters-courses/>.

Doctorate and Continuing Education Courses

These courses will be updated later in 2021. The same archive process will be implemented for these courses.

Separate Roundtable Degree Tracks to Be Discontinued

Effective April 1, 2021, the roundtable bachelor's and roundtable master's tracks will no longer be offered, but there will be an

opportunity to finish roundtable tracks that have just been started (see below).

This decision was made by the Commissioner Development chair with full concurrence of the National Commissioner Service Team. This change was made for the following reasons:

- Roundtable is an integral part of collaborative unit service.
- All commissioners should have an opportunity to learn about the value of roundtable, and the separate degree track had the potential to limit this opportunity.
- There will continue to be roundtable-related courses for the bachelor's, master's, and continuing education tracks.
- Simple and Unified — the elimination of this degree track will simplify the administration and delivery of the College of Commissioner Science for local councils.

The combined bachelor's degree track is effective Jan. 15, 2021, although local councils can offer separate bachelor's tracks until April 1, 2021. The combined master's degree track will be effective in April 2021. Those currently in the process of earning a roundtable degree will have the ability to be grandfathered so they can complete what they set out to achieve.

Roundtable Degree Track Transition Guidelines

- Grandfathering: If a commissioner completed their Bachelor of Roundtable Commissioner Science degree prior to April 1, 2021, they could continue following the roundtable degree track to complete their Master of Roundtable Commissioner Science degree by April 1, 2022.
- Degree certificates are provided on the current BSA National Commissioners Awards and Recognition webpage; the certificates have never had a separate template for roundtable degrees. Councils should use these BSA national certificates to keep things consistent.
- Archived classes: Bachelor's roundtable degree track courses will not be available after April 15, 2021. Master's roundtable degree track courses will not be available after April 1, 2022. These courses will not be available for reciprocity following these dates.



National-Level Training Events

<https://www.scouting.org/commissioners/training/national/>

Weeklong Conferences

The 2021 schedule is complete, and we will be offering eight weeklong conferences. Details are available at the link above.

Commissioners Week at Philmont Training Center,
June 6-12, 2021

- A Strong Unit Commissioner
- Empowering the District Commissioner Team
- Empowering the Council Commissioner Team
- Second Century Service — Updates on Unit Service
- Starting, Sustaining, and Growing Units
- Recruiting and Engaging Commissioners
- Serving All Units — Working with Venturing Crews, Sea Scout Ships, and Exploring Posts
- Leveraging Roundtable in Unit Service

Impact Sessions

Weekend impact sessions are currently on hold due to COVID-19. They will resume as soon as they can safely be done.

Virtual Impact Sessions

The development team has implemented virtual impact sessions, which are two-hour interactive training events. These sessions will occur monthly, and you can find additional information and registration information at the link above. We intend to continue conducting virtual impact sessions into the foreseeable future.

Here are some comments from commissioners who have attended recent virtual impact sessions:

- I like that it was a group of people who would have never met since we are from different regions and different council sizes.
- It was all helpful. I really liked the breakout session.
- I gained some new insights and encouragement regarding recruiting, which is often the hardest part of any role in the BSA. One key nugget was that I need to reevaluate my current habit of only looking for experienced Scouters to serve as commissioners, and open my mind to others that have a servant heart.
- A chance to hear from leaders in other councils who are facing similar challenges.



Best Resource for Units Equals an Effective Unit-Serving Commissioner

An effective commissioner is the single best resource for units at any stage of development.

When starting a new unit, the relationship between the new leadership and the new unit commissioner develops out of necessity. The unit in its infancy needs more attention, direction and coaching to ensure success. The new unit commissioner is committed to service the unit for 36 months to see the unit sustain and grow. Although the new unit commissioner and the unit leadership might have developed a great relationship during this time, it is the district commissioner's responsibility to determine if a change in commissioning would be beneficial going forward.

Commissioners must develop a relationship based on respect, candor, and trust.

When a commissioner is assigned to an existing unit, they should be introduced to the unit leadership by a friend of the unit. This friend could be the district commissioner, district executive or another Scouter. Commissioners need to work on the bond with the unit by attending parent/committee meetings and major unit events like courts of honor, camporees, and Pinewood Derbies, along with roundtable. Understand that as a commissioner you are not a member of the unit; you maintain your membership at the district level. In this stage of the relationship, a commissioner will need to attend more often to develop the rapport to assist with a detailed assessment with the unit leadership, which can lead to a unit service plan. When a unit needs assistance with program, finance, advancement, or membership, the commissioner can request district committee assistance through their district commissioner.

We have said a commissioner needs to have a “servant heart.” The knowledge of Scouting can be learned.

Commissioners need to stay current with all the changes that happen nationally and within their council. To achieve this, they need to attend roundtable, district commissioner meetings, and any special meetings held by their council. To be the single best resource, commissioners need to be trained and attend advanced training such as College of Commissioner Science, national impact sessions, national training conferences, and training offered at council- and district-level meetings. Commissioners need to know where to find answers and information.



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How do commissioners become the single best resource? Know where the resources are and use them.

Social Media

<https://www.scouting.org/commissioners/>

Unit Road Map

<https://blog.scoutingmagazine.org/>

newsletter@email.scoutingwire.org

A welcoming unit and an engaged commissioner go a long way in being a contributing factor to the success of the unit. Over time, the commissioner and the unit leadership will develop a strong relationship based on respect, candor, and trust. The commissioner remains current on changes that affect the unit and is prepared to guide and assist when needed. An informed unit commissioner is effective and will be the single best resource for a unit.



Program Support Helps Unit Service



The secret sauce in effective **unit service** is communication, relationship, and program knowledge. The third element is the focus of Program Support to help **unit commissioners** deliver timely and effective advice to unit leadership. As programs are improving and changing with accommodations for COVID-19, it is important that units are aware of these updates to keep programs active and youths engaged.



Newsletter — Program Updates

Starting with our own **Commissioner Newsletter**, our Program Support team provides the most current information in the **program update** article. They provide direct information from our national committee for dissemination to commissioners. Updates cover all four programs: Cub Scouting, Scouts BSA, Venturing and Sea Scouts. Each of these team members are considered subject matter experts (SME) for their program area.



Website Support

Program Support maintains a webpage within the BSA Commissioner Website ([Link](#)) with resources for all four youth programs. The webpage provides a list of resource links to help unit leaders stay current with program changes. To help units



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with challenges due to COVID-19, a wealth of helpful links are provided to address a broad range of issues. In addition, the BSA Commissioner website maintains a separate COVID-19 webpage with selected resources ([Link](#)).



Partnership With National Committees

Communication is a two-way street, so our Program Support SMEs are considered a part of the Key Three leadership for national program committees. It is a partnership in which program SMEs work collaboratively to develop and support program changes with the national committee. Also, our SMEs provide perspective on the operational side of the Commissioner Corps. Plus, many of our SMEs work directly with units, districts, or councils, providing perspective on **unit service** especially as it pertains to effectiveness of program change/adaptation. ([Link](#))

Unit commissioners can make a difference in keeping units active by sharing virtual/social distance ideas for programs. They need to know what these changes are in a timely manner to stay relevant. Between BSA websites, commissioner websites, social media, and our newsletter, commissioners can stay informed of program changes as they occur.





Latest Program Updates for the Commissioner Corps

Happy New Year! Here are the latest updates for Winter 2021 within each of the BSA programs to help our Commissioners Corps stay on top of current news, training and program changes. Some BSA programs have their own update website, so we will point you directly to them.

Given the challenges of the current COVID-19 pandemic, the Commissioner Website at the top level now has a COVID-19 resource page with current information ([Link](#)). Check it out for the latest links, as it is being updated regularly.

In addition, check out BSA's own Program Update [website](#) for other changes that are going on with each of the four programs.

Cub Scouts

Handbook Revision Work Groups

Work continues in updating the required Adventures to conform to the identified six areas of concentration that showcase the aims and methods of Scouting: character and leadership, safety, reverence, personal fitness, citizenship, and outdoors. Below are two resources to help get your units off to a good start.

Cub Cast Live

Three times a week, the editors of *Scouting* magazine and **Scout Life** (formerly *Boys' Life*) stream an event across Facebook, *Scout Life* YouTube channel, and *Scouting* magazine titled #TrekAt2. For 30 to 45 minutes, a topic of interest is featured. The resulting video is then posted to all three sites. Past subjects include how to build a water rocket, visits to national parks, cartoonists showing how they create their art, and Eagle Scout projects.

As of Dec. 11, 2020, the Friday time period is dedicated to Cub Scouts and renamed Cub Chat Live. The session includes two cohosts and features a relevant Cub Scout topic. Session topics are preplanned but subject to change based on feedback and needs from our constituents, our families. Approximately 4,000 people tuned in live to the first show. A week later, the same show had 11,000 views.

Check it out every Friday at 2PM Central at these links:

<https://facebook.com/scoutlifemag>

<https://facebook.com/scoutingmagazine>

Preview Adventures

Snap Ships has agreed to sponsor a preview adventure joining Duncan Yo-yos and the Barbara Sinatra Children's Foundation Protect Yourself Rules. Snap Ships is a game as well as a building system. Building pieces are similar to Lego, and multiple crafts can be built from a single kit. Blocks are interchangeable so blocks in each kit can be combined. Using the spacecrafts built from Snap Ships, youth engage in a game to save the world.

Together with Snap Ships, Adventure requirements will be built out for age-appropriate ranks.

Snap Ships is a TOTY 2021 finalist.

Scouts BSA

As 2021 rolls in, the following merit badges had updates: Archaeology, Collections, Digital Technology, Disability Awareness, Electricity, Fish and Wildlife Management, Fishing, Fly-Fishing, Lifesaving, Motorboating, Photography, Public Health, Rowing, Sports, Theater, and Woodwork. You can always find the updated merit badge requirements here: <https://www.scouting.org/programs/scouts-bsa/advancement-and-awards/merit-badges/>.

The National Council has delayed introducing the proposed Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion merit badge. The additional time will allow for the careful consideration and evaluation of feedback received from a wide variety of commenters on the draft requirements. Until further notice, all Scouts working on the Eagle Scout rank should continue to use current rank requirements.

The BSA will give Scouts who are achieving the Eagle Scout rank adequate time to earn the Eagle-required Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion merit badge. We will share updates regarding the merit badge with councils directly and via Scouting Wire. Specific questions are welcome via email at OfficeofChiefDiversityOfficer@scouting.org.

Recently, the Scouts BSA program webpage received a refresh. It now has an easy-to-use Troops Resources page, which links useful information for youth and adults. You can check out this page here: <https://www.scouting.org/programs/scouts-bsa/troop-resources/>. It includes information like:

- Guide to Safe Scouting
- Advancement resources
- Training for youth and adults
- Scouting forms (like the Eagle Scout application and nomination forms for awards)
- Link to the latest Guide to Advancement
- Marketing and recruitment materials
- And many more

Effective Jan. 1, 2021, local councils have the authority to grant limited extensions of time to complete Eagle, Quartermaster, or Summit requirements. These extensions are available only to youth members who qualify under the three tests listed in the advance copy (link below) of topics 9.0.4.0, 9.0.4.1, 9.0.4.2, and forms 11.2.0.0 and 11.2.1.0 from the 2021 edition of the Guide to Advancement (GTA). This new edition will be published early in the year. The BSA has posted advance copies of these topics and forms at www.scouting.org/advancement.

- Topic 9.0.4.0 lays out the three tests.
- Topic 9.0.4.1 outlines the process for requesting and reviewing a time extension.
- Topic 9.0.4.2 outlines the new appeal process if the council denies an extension.

The National Council will not publish the updated GTA containing these three topics until some point in 2021; the



authority outlined in topics 9.0.4.0, 9.0.4.1, and 9.0.4.2 is effective as of Jan. 1, 2021.

The BSA advises council advancement committees that after Dec. 31, 2020, there is no plan to authorize Covid extensions as has been allowed during 2020. However, it is possible that as of Jan. 1, 2021, Covid could become a circumstance that warrants an extension if it qualifies under the three tests listed in 9.0.4.0. Note that the existing Covid extension granted between Oct. 1, 2020, and Dec. 31, 2020, expires three months after it was issued.

Venturing

As commissioners, we all understand the importance of relationships with charter partners and the Key 3 in serving units. Venturing is no different, although their Key 3 will include a crew Advisor in place of a Cubmaster, Scoutmaster, or Skipper.

It is also no **mystery** that Venturing, and all units of course, served by a council or district need a connection to resourceful, knowledgeable, and engaged commissioners who can support them in building stronger program for youth.

Some questions to ponder:

How well do you serve Venturing in your districts or council?

Have you tried to recruit new commissioners based on their knowledge of a specific program?

What benefits might come from approaching recruiting from a more strategic process to serve crews and the Venturing program specifically?

What steps might you take to ensure that you are seeking out the broadest scope of potential candidates?

Have you thought about engaging your local or area Venturing Officers' Association (VOA) to help you with this function?

Are we missing the opportunity to engage in the unit service role adults who are great volunteers but might have never been asked to serve the program they know best?

As we work to transition into territories, it's important to remember that the real understanding of unit service to crews comes from the folks closest to the action — that is, district and council unit service teams. Territory teams, much like the areas now, will be in place to support and provide resources as needed. Familiarize yourself with the big picture.

To gain that BIG picture in your district or council, take a look at your district contacts report at least quarterly and run analysis on that data — called a unit contact visual analysis. Once you generate that report, you can filter by program. From that one report, you can easily see where you might need to place an emphasis on your recruiting efforts. Venturing commissioners are certainly one of our challenges. Historically, these units tend to receive fewer contacts. What can we do to change that culture?

There are opportunities for us to work together to address challenges. Retention is so important to all of us at this time. It's worth asking: How do we create a new vision and begin to work more collaboratively with program leaders to fulfill our promise to our Scouts? And as we think about retention, be aware that it's important that districts and councils encourage existing charter partners of Scouts BSA troops and packs to consider a

"sister" Venturing crew. It is a proven method for retaining older Scouts AND an added resource for support of any pack. Older youth in Venturing can provide support as den chiefs, at community service events, and many, many other events. In fact, Venturing emphasizes four main focus items, called **ALPS**:

- **Adventure** — Mentoring, leading, and participating in crew-led adventures
- **Leadership** — Ongoing leadership development through training, mentoring and hands-on leadership
- **Personal Growth** — Goal setting in support of personal growth
- **Service** — Leading and participating in community service

If you're interested in finding out more about Venturing or having a discussion with your regional/national leadership, visit www.venturing.org to contact your regional or national Advisor.

Sea Scouts

Sea Scouts saw more than 30 new ships start in 2020 and are poised for a great 2021. The program is growing in popularity as more youth find aquatic-based fun in Scouting. Sea Scout ships can center their program around paddle sports, scuba, or (of course) sailing!

Recently, there was a question posed to the national commodore regarding commissioners for Sea Scout ships and why more commissioners were not excited about providing unit service to the ships in their districts and councils. Was it a question of how to provide unit service or were there not enough commissioners to go around? To help resolve part of that, the commissioners were able to comment on the question of how. What does it take to be a commissioner for a Sea Scout ship? The answer is simple: Be a commissioner. Commissioner service does not take on a different role based on the unit type. Unit service is unit service.

Commissioners who want to learn more about Sea Scout ships (and Venturing crews and Explorer posts and clubs) will be interested in going to the Philmont Training Center (PTC) June 6-12 to spend a week with commissioners who are subject matter experts (SMEs) in these programs to develop a fuller understanding of the aims, goals, and methods these programs bring. Interestingly, a similar course will be offered at PTC July 18-24 with program SMEs, so there will be two opportunities over the summer to learn and gain a deeper understanding of these important older-youth programs.

Additionally, 2021 will see several virtual Seabadge courses. Seabadge is a weekend course that begins Friday afternoon and concludes with a closing ceremony before lunch on Sunday. Course participants and staff function as a model ship to help participants understand how a ship or youth-led unit should function. The curriculum includes 20 sessions with established objectives that are presented in a motivating and informative forum. It is highly recommended that commissioners attend a virtual Seabadge course to learn more about the program from Sea Scouts adult and youth leaders and experts. To find a Seabadge course in your area, check with your council commodore or a Sea Scout ship in your district.

For more information about Sea Scouting, please join their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/seascoutsbsa> and visit their web page at <https://seascout.org/>.



Our Exploring Units Need Unit Service, Too!

This quarter's newsletter theme is "What is Unit Service?" Unit service is an important ingredient for membership and unit retention, as well as membership and unit growth throughout our Scouting, Venturing, Sea Scouting, and Exploring programs. I know that I am preaching to the choir when I say that unit service, whether provided by our traditional Scouting commissioners and/or Exploring service team members (a.k.a. Exploring commissioners), is a crucial resource in helping all our units succeed and deliver on the Scouting, Venturing, Sea Scouting, and Exploring promise to all our youth.

During this year of the pandemic, we are not doing a very good job nationwide when it comes to unit service for our Exploring clubs and posts. Even before the pandemic hit and I spoke with Exploring unit advisors at every national, regional, area, council, district, or unit meeting I had the opportunity to attend, a common theme was that the only time they ever saw anyone from their home councils and/or districts was during the annual unit renewal process. Let me talk about our 2020 Exploring unit and membership numbers briefly to emphasize my earlier statements. At the beginning of 2020 before the pandemic hit, we started with 4,450 Exploring units, 95,400 youth, and 19,800 adults. At the end of 2020, we now have 3,025 Exploring units, 52,860 youth, and 14,200 adults. I am not implying these losses are due solely to the general lack of unit service to our Exploring units — that would be totally unfair and unfounded because I am sure that the pandemic's impact on Exploring meetings and activities has played a significant role in these alarming numbers. However, I am safe in saying that the majority of our councils, even before the pandemic, have not provided the same level of unit service to their Exploring units as they have to their traditional Scouting units. Remember, as I said earlier, unit service or more specifically, the Scouting and/or Exploring commissioners are the single most important resource we can provide a unit leader to assist them especially during this pandemic. If we had those commissioners supporting our Exploring units to the level enjoyed by our traditional Scouting units, our Exploring leaders would possibly have had someone to help them weather the pandemic with recommendations on how to provide virtual and hands-on Exploring activities to their youth. And we might not have had such dramatic losses in our Exploring units and membership in 2020.

I am not naïve to the fact that we have a shortage of both Scouting and Exploring commissioners nationwide but, as much as possible, we need to maintain reliable unit service with our Exploring units, too. As council and district commissioners, let's make Exploring unit service one of our New Year's resolutions for 2021. Let's remember that we do not have to know everything as commissioners, but we do have to be there because relationships are everything!



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Roundtable IS Unit Service

Hopefully by now the phrase “Roundtable IS Unit Service” is familiar to you. It might seem like a no-brainer, but it is important to shout it from the mountaintops that roundtable is the place to be when it comes to keeping up to date with timely information and fresh program tips. As commissioners, we strive to bring the best possible service to units, and roundtable remains vital to sustaining momentum and vision in our districts and councils. While the methods of delivery might have changed over the past year — from the traditional in-person meeting to a virtual space or perhaps a hybrid approach — the essence of the monthly roundtable remains the same: to help units succeed.

To highlight how little has changed, let us review the 1963 *Commissioner Service Manual*, which describes roundtable as having two key elements:

“The will-to-do — in the form of morale, inspiration, enthusiasm, and vision — is distributed regularly (for the will-to-do is perishable).

The skill-to-do — in the form of skills, program ideas, techniques, and information — is taught a piece at a time (for there is much to learn).”

Today, in 2021, commissioners continue to boost morale and enthusiasm and share program ideas and useful information during the monthly roundtable. Through a promoted, well-planned program, your district’s roundtable is sure to succeed. However, you might wonder how to make all the pieces come together; remember that you are not alone, and you have many resources available to you! For example, by using the [Roundtable Support webpage](#) and tailoring your program to fit the needs of the units in your district or council, you have the power to enhance the Scouting experience of the youth we all serve. Additionally, training materials exist to guide you, such as roundtable commissioner basic training and roundtable-specific courses within the curriculum of the College of Commissioner Science.

Again, the 1963 *Manual* emphasizes the key to an effective roundtable:

“If the roundtable succeeds, people will come to it. If they come to it, they will get help toward success in operating units. The roundtable commissioner helps units succeed by helping their leaders succeed.”

So plan ahead, swing into action, and invite unit leaders, unit committee members, unit commissioners, and members of the district operating committee to take part in your monthly roundtable. When we work together as a team, there is no limit to the unit service we can provide!



Chris Beaver
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Effective Unit Service Leads to Healthy Units Serving Youth

Unit Service. When you read these two words, what comes to mind? Have you heard this term used recently? As a commissioner — whether you are a unit commissioner or an administrative commissioner — is unit service sufficiently occurring in your district or the unit you serve, even during these unusual times? How can we improve unit service to ensure our youth have the Scouting experience they expect and will benefit from?

Consistent, meaningful, and helpful unit service is possibly needed more in today's environment than it has ever been. To be sure unit service is well understood, let's first review what unit service and its expectations are.

In the previous edition of the Commissioner Newsletter, Larry Chase, our National Commissioner Service Team chair, noted that we need to support our unit leaders by building relationships to help ensure every member of the BSA has a great Scouting experience. I'd like to use this opportunity to expand on Larry's comments.

Unit Leader Support — I'm sure many of us will agree that supporting our unit leaders is a key method for ensuring they have the knowledge, training, and latest information to address their unit meetings. Knowledge can come from attending monthly roundtables and reading available online information. Training is obvious, but do we take the time to ask if unit leaders have completed their basic training? Have you checked in Commissioner Tools to confirm that your leaders have taken the necessary training? Do you ask if leaders have any questions once the training is completed? How often do we communicate and listen to our unit leaders regarding either the progress or help they might need?

Relationships — Relationships are that “foot in the door” to enable continual and meaningful communication with your leaders. They build trust. How have you worked to build those valuable relationships that ultimately ensure helpful conversations can and will take place?

Great Scouting Experience — Each of our youth is expecting something special when they join the BSA. If they join a weak or unhealthy unit, with inexperienced leadership or a skeleton unit program, that dream is unlikely to be fulfilled. How is your commissioner team, or you as a unit commissioner, helping to ensure our units are well-positioned to deliver everything a unit needs to enable a youth's “mountain top” experience?



Mike Weber
Regional Commissioner
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Healthy Units — Healthy units put all these elements together. An active and well-trained commissioner team, with enough unit commissioners to serve each unit in a district and council, can work together to ensure all elements of unit service are covered.

Action Item — Discuss within your commissioner teams how everyone can best improve unit service across your districts and councils. Let's all focus over the coming months on how to help our units succeed and help them where needed. Let's all do what we can to retain youth in our program through healthy units and ensure those youth enjoy a memorable and positive experience.



What Is Unit Service? – Know Your Resources

Unit leaders and their Scouts are customers for unit service. Commissioners are unit service. So what does that mean if you are a commissioner? A commissioner is assigned to a unit to ensure they have all the tools and information necessary to provide the best possible Scouting experience to the Scouts in their unit. The assigned commissioner should know the resources that are available to them to help the unit leaders. So what are those resources? They fall into a couple of categories.

- People
 - District commissioner — your district commissioner is a great resource for your questions.
 - District committee members can offer help in advancement, membership, camping, training, and program.
 - Other more experienced unit commissioners can help with questions or simply to give advice on how to do your job.
- Information
 - Commissioner Website:
<https://www.scouting.org/commissioners/>
 - COVID-19 Resources page compiles information from other BSA websites: <https://www.scouting.org/commissioners/covid-19-resources/>
 - Program Resources Support page has program information and links to related BSA Program sites: <https://www.scouting.org/commissioners/program-support-resources/>
 - Starting, Sustaining, and Growing Units page has membership and unit information: <https://www.scouting.org/commissioners/starting-sustaining-and-growing-units/>
 - Exploring for Commissioners page has all things Exploring: <https://www.scouting.org/commissioners/exploring-for-commissioners/>
 - Commissioner Newsletter:
<https://www.scouting.org/commissioners/newsletter/>
 - Commissioner Manuals:
<https://www.scouting.org/commissioners/manuals/>
 - Social media sites for commissioners
 - Commissioners for the Boy Scouts of America <https://www.facebook.com/CommissionersOfTheBoyScoutsOfAmerica/>
 - Commissioner Development — BSA <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1976324522626471>
 - Roundtable News and Discussion <https://www.facebook.com/groups/998658400617717>
 - Scouting Forums
 - BSA Commissioners: <https://discussions.scouting.org/c/bsa-commissioners/3196>



Darlene Sprague
*National Commissioner Service
Resources Chair*
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Now that you are armed with people and information resources, it is up to you to establish a great working relationship with the unit leaders for your assigned unit(s). Build a relationship that lets them know you are there for them and that they can count on you to answer their questions and coach them through being a great unit leader. Unit service is being a willing and able commissioner for your unit leaders.



Questions and Answers

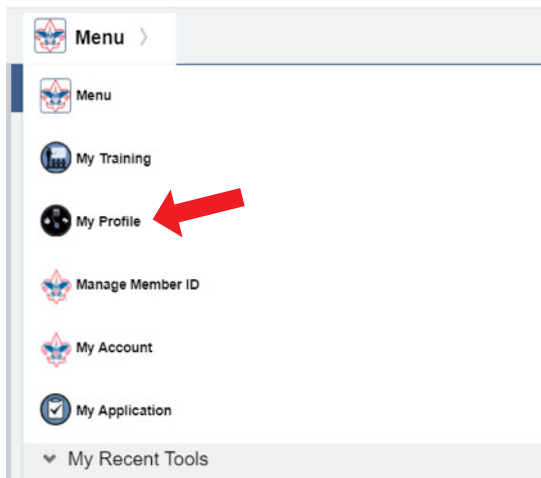
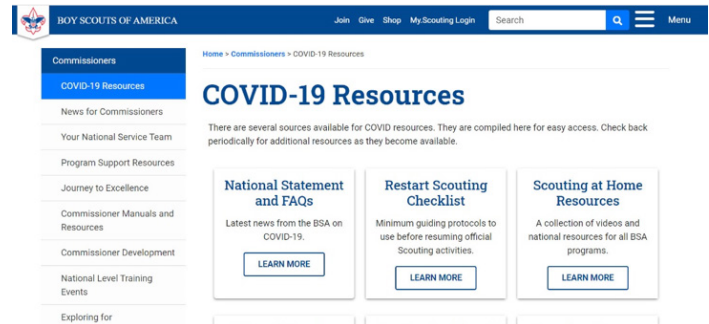
Question: I am not getting the commissioner emails that I am hearing about. How do I get on the list to receive them?

Answer: There are several steps you can take right now to ensure that you receive the newsletter email: (1) Make sure your current email address is listed in your **My Profile** on my.scouting.org (see screenshot below). Your email is listed at the bottom of the contact information under Contact. (2) Check your spam filters/boxes and make sure that the boyscoutsofamerica@email.scouting.org is on your whitelist. (3) If you are using a business email address, check to be sure that the email is not blocked before it enters the system.

We have a large email distribution list. An issue we cannot change: If you ever felt you were receiving too many emails from the BSA (any of their various lists) and chose to unsubscribe, the system will unsubscribe you from all emails, including the commissioner related lists, not just the email you received at the time you unsubscribed. If you received this newsletter via email, you are all set. If you know of commissioners who have not received emails, they can add their email address to a commissioner subscription list at <https://t.email.scouting.org/lp/subCommissionerNews>. This will resolve most issues.

Question: Where can I find a comprehensive list to BSA changes and resources for COVID-19?

Answer: On the Commissioner Website, we have added a new page called COVID 19 Resources <https://www.scouting.org/commissioners/covid-19-resources/> where we have put links to all the other BSA sites and resources. Check back periodically for updates.



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Updated October 2020

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