

Best Practices: An Active Commissioner Staff—A Key Ingredient to Success

Your responsibility in delivering the promise of a quality Scouting program is directly related to the number of active, trained, and accountable commissioners you have. You might ask yourself:

“How can I recruit enough commissioners to serve all the units in my district?”

The answer is simple: You don't . . . not without the help of your district Key 3 and your assistants!

One of the things you learn is to recruit volunteers to help you do the critical things important to a successful Scouting program. The first thing you do is identify how many commissioners you will need based on a ratio of one assistant district commissioner for every five unit commissioners. Then analyze where your units are organized and where units will be organized in the future. You will pair units from the same chartered organization under the same commissioner.

You will match units based on their transitioning from packs to troops to teams and crews. This determination will assist in determining if you need a ratio of one commissioner to three or four units.



This process can help with your commitment to the national parent initiative and involving more parents in the program. Now you are ready to take a look at who can serve as commissioners.

Developing a Unit Commissioner Prospect List

The following plan has been used successfully by the commissioners in the Bay-Lakes Council of Appleton, Wisconsin, under the leadership of Scout Executive Mike Surbaugh. The key ingredient to success is to use what works for you. Throughout BSA literature on commissioner service we give district commissioners many ideas on finding unit commissioner prospects and offer guidance on recruitment strategies. You are in constant need of commissioners. Very few districts have a full commissioner staff. One statement that will always tell you if effective recruitment is occurring is: “Let me take a look at your prospect list.” If the district executive and district commissioner cannot produce an identical list of unit commissioner prospects—or any list, which is more common—it tells us they are not recruiting effectively.

Ideas for finding commissioner prospects are found in the *Commissioner Administration of*

Unit Service manual, No. 34128. Fourteen suggestions are given, from friends, business associates, and executives to former Scouts. All are good ideas to guide you in your recruitment process, but will not yield a specific prospect list. In addition, there are various recruitment strategies such as “group recruiting” in a specific company whereby the president brings together a group of top employees and they are all recruited at the same time, even if most do not have a Scouting background. This may work in some places and for the district commissioner at the time.

Last, without a solid prospect list, district commissioners tend to model the worst recruiting strategies for unit leaders. We have all witnessed the commissioner who at a roundtable says to the assembled unit leaders, “We really need some more unit commissioners. Our meeting is next Tuesday. Hope we see some of you there.” In addition to speaking to the wrong audience, this has taught Cubmasters that the way to get den leaders is to stand up at the end of the pack meeting and make a general plea for leadership as we are “really hurting for den leaders.” You don't walk through the *Selecting Quality Leaders* worksheet, give



them the expectation of developing nominating committees with their units, and then speak at a roundtable and ask all the Cubmasters to help out by being unit commissioners! This comes out of frustration from not being able to find good prospects for unit commissioners.

The System

This is a tried and true recruitment program. It has never failed to develop a solid prospect list and ends the frustration of staff and district commissioners that you hear: “We just can’t find anyone.” The system uses the premise that the best prospects are those with a good Scouting background, solid progression of leadership, and program knowledge. While someone “from the community” without Scouting background may make a good commissioner, it has been my experience that this works well with district committees and can rarely be seen at the commissioner level. This system has never yielded fewer than 25 qualified prospects with small (30 to 40 units) districts. The average district of 50 to 70 units will usually get 50-plus qualified prospects.

STEP 1 Set meeting with district commissioner, district executive, and assistant district commissioners (if any).

Allocate three hours for the meeting. This will not complete the process in a very large district, but is usually adequate for a 50-unit district.

STEP 2 Prior to the meeting,

assemble materials—five years of past leader rosters and current-year leader and member rosters for each unit in the district. Supplies include highlighters, blank paper, pizza, and beverages.

STEP 3 Separate the rosters in order by years and unit next to each other.

Match up the troops that typically draw from each pack. As technology has improved, it

is now helpful to have a computer connected to ScoutNET available. For this, you need a meeting place with large tables available to spread everything out.

STEP 4 Orientation. This is a paraphrase of the general talk: “OK, what we are going to do is become investigators. We are going to find the hidden talent within our program and identify some excellent prospects to join our commissioner staff. I think we can all agree that the most effective unit commissioners would be those people who have good leadership experience in a unit, have seen the program work with their son, and are committed to the values of Scouting. The first thing we need to do is take our highlighters and start with the oldest year and work forward. What we are looking for is a person with a pattern of successive leadership experience, e.g., DL, ADL, assistant CM, CC, etc. You may notice that after the fourth or fifth year they drop off the charter. We then look for their son in the associated Boy Scout troop (or check via ScoutNET). If the youth is in the unit, we then look for their parent on the troop roster. If they are not in a key leadership position, this would qualify them as a “suspect.”

STEP 5 Process. At this point, the room gets pretty quiet as everyone starts looking. It gets fun quickly as they start to get some “hits.” You will find the staff starts to figure out that you can tell a lot about a family from their registration record. Some examples of good “suspects”:

- Mom and Dad were registered in the pack in alternate years; this happens often. This is exciting because it says the

family is committed, and both have good leadership experience and have decided to share the responsibility. Both might make good suspects.

- Mom is involved in the pack; Dad is on the committee of a troop. This indicates they have a second son in the program. Watch for when Mom is going to be stepping out.
- Mom was on the charter for multiple years but now has dropped off. Dad is now on the troop charter. Obviously, Mom said, “OK, Dad, your turn. I’ve done Cubs; you can do the Boy Scouts.” Mom is now in our minds as a good suspect for unit commissioning.
- Mom or Dad is a second-year Webelos leader for the second time. Excellent prospect as they have a second son who will soon be leaving for the troop, and a great time to catch them.
- Great succession of leadership in the pack, son moves on to the troop, now parents are unregistered. You may find the troop has a bunch of assistant Scoutmasters and they weren’t needed in a key leadership role. Great suspects.

STEP 6 The vetting process. After you have assembled a suspect list, you must write down two names and numbers of other key leaders who were in the unit at the same time. They may or may not still be involved; it doesn’t matter. This step is crucial as the ADCs will now play a key role in the follow-up of the suspects. This meeting is now concluded when you have 50 to 100 suspects. Next to each are names and phone numbers of two people who know them.

STEP 7 **Narrowing the field of suspects to PROSPECTS.** This step is often skipped; don't let that happen! Within one week of the initial meeting, each suspect's "references" should be called. The ADC initiates a call: "Hi, Jim, we are looking at Cheryl to help in a Scouting job called a unit commissioner. Briefly, this is someone who is a mentor to packs and troops. How do you think she would be?" The reason this step is crucial is that it sells the ADC on the person. Ninety percent of the time you are going to get great feedback, and it cements the ADC or DC (who will be recruiting) that this is someone to get excited about and is not just a name on paper. The person is now a qualified prospect. The person making the call will often get some good additional information that would help in recruitment. Sometimes you need to eliminate the person based on the call. That's OK; it saves time.

STEP 8 **The list.** Everyone now agrees on the specific list of PROSPECTS. The DE and DC should have the same list.

STEP 9 **Recruitment.** It must be held sacred that recruitment will be with two members of the district and the prospect. Over coffee, breakfast, in their home, wherever—it must be a formal, in-person meeting. No deviations. Steps 6–9 are often shortcut. The staff leader must not allow this to happen. Frequently, a well-meaning person will come up with the idea to save time (make it easier) by sending the suspects a letter, sending the references a letter, holding a steak fry at camp and inviting all the suspects, etc. (These all will fail.) NO, NO, NO. Steps 6–9 must be followed for this to work effectively.

STEP 10 **Follow-up.** The staff leader and council commissioner can now check to see how the recruitment is progressing. It is a big investment of time, but it pays off and removes the excuse/problem of not knowing who to go after. This method gives a solid prospect list that should yield enough people to fill any commissioner staff.

Thoughts for Future Reference

“ We must open the doors of opportunity. But we must also equip our people to walk through those doors. ”

—Lyndon Baines Johnson

“ Act like you expect to get into the end zone. ”

—Joe Paterno

“ Character, not circumstances, makes the man. ”

—Booker T. Washington

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