Opening a new Scout Group or Section

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This factsheet has been written to help you identify what you need to do in order to open a new Beaver Scout Colony, Cub Scout Pack, Scout Troop or a whole new Scout Group.

Sometimes when opening a new Group, it is a good idea to start one section at a time, over a period of time.

The following 10 steps are based on experience, using idea that work.

1. Research

Where? There are many reasons for opening a new Scout Group or Section. You may be:

- responding to an enquiry from a community *or*
- investigating an area within your District where there is no Scouting such as a new housing estate, a village, a community centre, or religious building - Mosque, Hindu Temple, Church etc.

Assuming there is a need in the area you have targeted you need to decide what you will be opening first - a Colony, Pack, Troop?

Your initial research in the area will probably point to the age group most in need.

The District Commissioner is responsible for Scouting in the area and it is important to ensure that the District Team is in support of opening a new Scout Group. From this moment on a District Team member should be involved in the work to open the Group.

2. Starting Off

Local Approval

Discuss the new Group with the Police, Community Workers, Neighbourhood Watch Groups, Residents' Associations, Schools and Places of Worship - these contacts will provide possible in-routes to meeting places, adult support, finance and local information.

The more support received publicly from local community groups the more credibility Scouting gets with the local population.

The Section

Agree the age range and Sections. Usually the most logical move will be to start a new Group with a Beaver Scout Colony and move onto other Sections at a later date.

An Integrated Section could be considered for ages 6 to 10 initially, depending on local circumstances.

Jobs To Be Done

Draw up simple Job Descriptions and Person Specifications with the District listing the jobs that you must have recruited before being able to open a new Group i.e., Leaders, Assistant Leaders, Helpers, Group Scout Leader.

These need only to be a page each but must be specific listing what people will be asked to do.

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3. Promotion To The Community

A good way to establish a new Scout Group is to work with a community that is already established e.g., a school, community or religious group.

Meeting with the Headteacher or a community head, to gain their support, is critical. Promote the benefits of Scouting and why their organisation should support a Group being established.

It may also be appropriate to ask about potential meeting places and whether Scouting could use them and on what arrangement.

4. Community Event - Selling Scouting

Ask to have a Scout presence at any events about to take place locally where parents and/or children will be attending i.e., parents evenings, school plays, calendar events, religious dates, promotional events, fundraising events and so on.

This is an opportunity to raise awareness of Scouting. It could be a small display with simple Scout images or providing a variety of activities for people to join in with.

This gives you the opportunity to:

1) promote what Scouting is and does through active participation,
2) speak to adults and parents interested in their child/children joining *and*
3) find adults who may be able to help.

This is one of the best opportunities to speak informally to adults and parents explaining what will be needed to open a Scout Group and find out how they may be able to help.

You have already drawn up Job Descriptions so you are able to state exactly what adult help will be needed.

By the end of this event you should have a list of names and addresses of those interested in their children joining Scouts and adults who may be able to help.

5. Interested Adults

Once you have collected names of parents, adults and young people interested in Scouting a 'waiting list' has been created.

Make regular contact with these people to maintain their interest and keep them informed of the plans to open the Scout Group.

When you are ready, invite the adults to a meeting to find out more. This meeting should be arranged if possible where the event took place i.e., school, community centre, religious building - somewhere that they are familiar with.

This meeting should also be promoted through other ways - newsletters, handouts to be given to parents waiting by the school gate (with permission from the Headteacher), announced in addresses, promoted at any further community events and put in leaflets for community/religious leaders and teachers to give out to young people and adults. By doing this, additional parents and adults can be reached too.

6. The Promotional Meeting

This is an opportunity to promote the Section(s) you are opening:

- how it works,
- what is required,
- who in the area is already supporting the idea,
- what support is provided for anyone involved and,
- the benefits of being involved in Scouting.

Then is the time to be honest and state what jobs must be filled by adults before the Section can be opened.

Providing people with the Job Descriptions will help people decide what level of involvement they can give.

You will know from your list that some adults present will be willing to help and this is an opportunity to formalise their job.

This is also an opportunity to ask those present of any other people in the community who could be approached and asked to take on some of the jobs.

To ensure as many adults as possible can turn up for this meeting, you may wish to provide quiet games for anyone with children.

Should this evening not provide enough adults to take on roles to open a Scout Group, then a similar meeting could be repeated taking into consideration any aspects that could be different or changed slightly; location, time, day, method.

7. Following Up Offers

Contact anyone who has offered to do a job within days after the meeting to keep them interested. If we don't follow people up quickly they will think we are not interested.

Provide them with some introductory information on Scouting, the Scout District. Use the Welcome Toolkit, available from the Scout Information centre. Take this opportunity to ensure that a CRB form is completed.

Give them an opportunity for them to ask questions or clarify anything they are unsure of. Remember not to use Scout 'jargon' if they are new to Scouting.

8. Getting Ready To Open

Once enough adults have agreed to take a role and all the appropriate checks have taken place, arrange a mutually acceptable date and venue to look at the next steps

This may be the first time the group of adults have all met together. Time should be spent helping them get to know a little about each other.

It is also the time to look at issues such as:

- meeting day and times,
- meeting place arrangements,
- start date,
- programme,
- training,
- number of young people for the first few months.

Where and When

Firstly agreement must be made as to what day the Scout Group will meet,. Those who will be running the meetings should decide this. The time of the meetings should also be decided so that everyone can attend.

Although a meeting place has been agreed in principle someone will have to take responsibility to check that the day and time chosen is available.

The start date should now be decided. This will be down to the Leaders and helpers. One factor maybe the appointments procedure and that of investing the Leaders. The new Leaders may want to wait until they are in uniform before starting, alternatively the District may provide a uniform presence for the first few weeks. This decision must be made between the District and the Leaders.

What Programme and How

It is now time to begin the planning of a programme. With the assistance of the District some simple games and activities should be explored and maybe even tried out.

Remember that all the Leaders, helpers and young people will be new, so games and activities that help everyone get to know each other are a good start.

Do not be too ambitious initially with the programme. The Leaders and helpers will gradually gain confidence over the weeks. If there are specific activities that the new Leaders and helpers feel unable to provide yet, ask 'specialists' from other Scout Groups to come and help for one week. The programme will need to be exciting and fun for the young people.

Another decision worth exploring is how many young people are accepted into the Section. The new Leaders and helpers may wish to set a limit lower than the maximum number, for example limit the intake to 12 members for the first three months.

This will give everyone a period of time to get used to each other and operate a manageable sized meeting. If there are too many young people, control may be harder and could put off the new Leaders.

Equipment and Resources

The new Scout Group will need equipment in order to provide a programme. Initially this only needs to be basic and may be given on loan from neighbouring Scout Groups and the District.

Basic equipment such as pens pencils, paper, balls and games should be easily acquired.

Alternatively these may be purchased by applying for a start up grant which may be available from the Scout District and/or County as well as local Councils and grant giving bodies.

Another avenue may be to negotiate use of equipment already used in the meeting place, such as the schools games equipment.

An essential resource is the programme books and handbooks for the relevant section.

The Leaders will, with some assistance and guidance from the District, need to set a subscription charge. The amount charged will vary from area to area depending on issues such as social backgrounds but needs to cover running costs of the Scout Group.

Training

It is a good time to set up visits to other Sections in the District for the new Leaders and helpers. This will give them an opportunity to meet other Leaders already operating in the area and give them a chance to see the Section working. This may take a few weeks of visiting depending on what is required.

Support

It may be appropriate for the District to consider providing on the job training particularly through the first few weeks or months of opening.

If either a District member or Leader from another Group is able to attend for the first few weeks it will provide an opportunity to learn games and activities alongside each other. This will ensure no one feels too much ‘in at the deep end’

9. Youth Membership

With everything in place, the one thing you will now need to find is young people. It may be the list from the ‘Community Event’ will provide the number of young people the Scout Group is able to take on.

Letters inviting them to enrol at the opening meeting should be sent detailing the date, time, location and cost. After this time it is likely that word of mouth will promote the Scout Group too.

If it is felt that more young people should be recruited, the most effective way to achieve this is through an active school presentation. See the separate factsheet, *Recruiting Young People,* for details.

10. First Meeting

It will be important to ensure that enough adults from the District are present to give a friendly and welcome greeting to both parents and young people as they arrive. We must welcome parents/adults as soon as possible and make them feel part of the Scouting family.

Additional Help

The first meeting is an opportunity to ensure support from any parents that were not involved in the formation of the new Scout Group.

By asking them what will you be doing to help this Group, and offering them a list of jobs that need filling - such as reading a story, making the drinks,

providing transport, helping to fund-raise - it is likely that several parents will come forward.

Devise an ‘enrolment form’ which on one side asks for details of the child wishing to join and on the other side lists the jobs that need to be filled.

Any job listed should have a job description available so that specifics asked by any adult can be answered. Make sure that any job you ask people to do has been agreed by the Leaders and helpers and does need doing. Do not let people become ‘spare parts’ as we will lose them and they will not return.

The first night is a chance to welcome new adults into Scouting. By asking them to become involved and helping in a small way it gives them an opportunity to see what goes on. Once they have been involved in this way it may be that the Section Leader can ask them to take on a fuller role in a different or more regular way.

Group Executive Committee

This is a good time to look at recruiting a Group Executive Committee, therefore not asking people to commit to a regular youth work role but an occasional administration or fund-raising role.

If the Group has a community ‘sponsor’ for this project it is a good idea to ask them to become involved in this Group Executive too therefore taking a further interest in the life of the Scout Group.

FURTHER HELP

If you would like information on any aspect of opening a new Group please contact the Field Development Service at Headquarters.

RESOURCES:

Available from the Scout Information Centre:

- Recruiting Adults - a Practical Guide
- Adult Support prompt cards
- Leaflet on the 6 steps to Adult Recruitment
- Welcome Pack - A Toolkit for Scout Groups
- Promotional posters and postcards for all Sections
- Factsheet - Making the most of Promotional Posters and Postcards

Available from the Field Development Service:

- Example letters, activities and handouts