

## 2.12 Building a Skills Directory for Your Scout Fellowship



### Why have a skills directory?

Every Scout Fellowship will have members who possess a variety of skills and talents. Wherever possible these skills should be developed to best serve the needs of local Scouting (see section 2.13 'Developing Personal Skills').

However, to be most effective, a record needs to be kept of who possesses which skills. This is so that the Scout Fellowship is able to quickly and easily respond to requests to provide Active Support by deploying the most relevant people.

### What information should be included in a Skills Directory?

Any information that may be useful in supporting local Scouting should be recorded.

This will include:

- Formal Scout training and qualifications (such as Adventurous Activities Authorisations, First Response Training, etc)
- Formal external training and qualifications (such as First Aid Training, Activity qualifications by nationally recognised bodies such as the Mountain Leadership Training Board(s), British Canoe Union, Royal Yachting Association, etc.)
- Former (or current) Warrants held (including Section details, dates and training – for instance, former Leaders with Pack Holiday Certificates)
- Professional qualifications and occupation
- Relevant hobbies and interests
- The areas in which people would like to help or develop their skills.

### How should this information be obtained?

Some of this information can be obtained from existing records – especially in the case of warranted Leaders or former Leaders. Be sure that your members understand where your information comes from and what it is for – see 'Storing Information and The Law' later in this section.

Much of this information comes from the members themselves. However you will find some people reluctant to reveal their skills. This may be because they don't like to boast, don't have time to fill in forms or because they have forgotten skills acquired a long time ago.

To overcome this problem it is a good idea to have a 'brain storming session' to bring out all the skills that ideally would be listed in the Skills Directory. As ideas are put forward, each member should record which of the skills they have.

Another idea is to split into pairs and for each member to question their partner on their Scouting history, professional career, hobbies and interests and so on. By asking the right questions it is possible

to draw people out and find out a great deal about them, including long forgotten qualifications, useful but unusual hobbies, work related skills and so on. This is much more fun than asking members to list their own skills and is a good ice breaker for new Scout Fellowships.

However, care should be taken when this is used with new members as they may misunderstand the reason for the 'grilling'!

### **How should this information be stored and used?**

A computer database is ideal for storing this sort of information. You could use everything from a simple spreadsheet to a full relational database (if someone has the skills). Even a simple text file can be searched for 'keywords' when it come to finding out who has suitable skills for an activity.

A well designed database can also be used to remind members when formal qualifications (such as First Aid certificates or Adventurous Activity Authorisations) are due to expire.

However, not every Scout Fellowship has access to this technology and even a big book or cards in an old shoebox can serve the purpose.

Recovered information should be simple to read and ideally be indexed by relevant skills rather than simply by member's name.

A well designed Skills Directory will allow the Scout Fellowship to quickly respond to various requests with: "We have two members with current abseiling Authorisations" or "We have six members who can teach knots and lashings" or "I'm sorry, but no-one has any experience of electronics."

### **Why limit the directory to the Scout Fellowship?**

Once the Skills Directory is up and working there is no reason why other people shouldn't be added to the system (subject to legal requirements – see below).

For instance, a Group based Scout Fellowship may wish to extend the system to include parents and supporters in the Group. Likewise, a District based Scout Fellowship may offer to maintain such a system for all adults in the District.

Many supporters of Scouting never get involved because they are never asked to do anything specific that they'd enjoy. This is because all too often we make general requests for help because we don't know where people's strengths lie.

By maintaining a Skills Directory for the Scout Fellowship, and by extending this to the wider support system we can often involve people who would never respond to a general request for help.

### **Storing information and the law**

Any personal information held on computer is subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act(s). Scout Fellowships (as an 'unincorporated members club') do not need to register under the requirements of the Data Protection Act(s) and officials of the Scout Fellowship are able to store and use such information with the permission of the 'data subjects'.

This requirement however will in future be extended to most forms of record keeping (including paper records). It is good practice therefore (and will become a requirement) to seek the express permission of everyone whose details are stored. These people should also be advised of the following:

- What type of information is held (names, addresses, skills, hobbies, etc.)
- Why it is held (to support local Scouting, etc.)
- The source of the data (supplied by the person themselves, District training records, etc.)

- Who has access to the information (Executive Committee, District officials, etc).
- Who the 'Data Controller' is for the Scout Fellowship (usually the Secretary or other elected official).

For more information, please contact the Scout Information Centre at Gilwell Park.