

Programme Planning for Small Troops



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0845 300 1818

Planning for a small Troop of say 4 - 8 Scouts is different from planning for a larger Troop. There can however be some specific advantages to running a small Troop and these include:

- each Scout can have individual attention from a Leader
- every Scout's ideas can be heard and if appropriate put into practice
- the needs for personnel, equipment and transport are small.
- the whole Troop can take an active part in planning.

That is not to say there are not disadvantages and these perhaps should be acknowledged. The difficulties of:

- unusual or no Patrol System, if the Troop wished to try this method.
- the success of some events being dependent on a full turn out
- insufficient numbers to undertake minority interests
- possibly an overpowering number of adults

What is important for the small Troop is to focus on the advantages and to try and overcome the difficulties.

Programme basis

Probably the first thing you have to do when running a small Troop is to give yourself

permission to change things. Many of the Scout Association publications are written for what may seem to be the ideal Troop but that does not mean that to change things is wrong. The Balanced Programme is very flexible to run and can be adopted equally well no matter the size of your Troop. You can still include activities into your Programme that are fun and challenging and you can involve everyone, as members of the Troop Forum in the planning of them. If you achieve this, your Troop will undoubtedly start to grow.

One of the advantages of a small Troop is that all members have the opportunity to influence the Programme. It is important however not to be drawn into the trap of spending too long talking about what you might do, rather than actually 'doing' it.

The Patrol System

There is no longer a fixed format for organising the Troop but the use of Patrols, along with other groupings, is still popular. The traditional model of a Patrol is one in which the older Scout acts as a leader, but Patrols do not need to follow this format and you may have a number of Scouts taking on a leadership role. Even in the smallest of Troops it is important to have at least one larger, or perhaps two small Patrols. This helps to give the Scouts an identity within the Troop.

Balanced Programme

The Balanced Programme, with the range of Programme Zones, methods and ways of working, should present no organisational difficulties for the smaller Troop. Even the Challenge Awards can be organised on a collective, rather than an individual

The Scout Information Centre

Gilwell Park Chingford London E4 7QW Tel + 44 (0)20 8433 7100 Fax + 44 (0)20 8433 7103 email info.centre@scout.org.uk www.scoutbase.org.uk

basis, so most if not all of the Troop can take part together.

Other programme ideas

A Scout Programme is made up of far more than just the training activities and some of your most successful ideas may well come from the Scouts themselves. The Programme may well include a large number of evenings away from the Troop room, visiting places of interest such as police or fire station, or a local sport and recreation centre. It might mean a visit to the local campsite to take part in some of the activities they have on offer, or simply a day or night hike together. All these ideas can be used to help develop a Balanced Programme and some may contribute towards a particular Activity Badge, or Challenge Award. Many of these events may well appeal to some of the Scout's friends who are not in the Troop, so regular 'bring a friend' events should be considered - both to increase numbers for the activity and possibly recruit further Scouts.

Using available support

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of running a programme for a small Troop is the ability to recognise and use what help is available from your own Scout District and other organisations around you. Your programme can be greatly enhanced by:

- joint meetings - with other Troops, Guide Companies, Boys' Brigade Companies and other youth organisations.
- joint activities - a wide game with another Troop in your District, or link with another Troop to go Climbing or Sailing for example.

- joint camps - an opportunity for your Scouts to camp with a Patrol from another Troop
- District camps/activities - many Districts run a wide array of activities which your Scouts could take part in, possibly ranging from the annual camping competition to a first aid courses. Activity badge courses and Troop Leadership courses may also be available. Some of these may be also be available at County level.

Why not invite your Assistant District Commissioner (Scouts) to your Troop meeting to tell your Scouts about the opportunities there are. You might also invite the Assistant District Commissioner, Assistant County/Area Commissioner (International), Assistant District Commissioner/ Assistant County/Area Commissioner (Activities), Assistant District Commissioner/ Assistant County/Area Commissioner (Special Needs) as they may also have some good ideas and activities to offer.

In this context it is also useful to be aware of what the other youth organisations in your area are doing. Many specialist activities and weekends away, such as camping, climbing or hill walking are available to all members of the youth service - of which we are most certainly one.

Doing your best

Perhaps the biggest concern that most people running small Troops express is that they are unable to offer everything that other Troops do. This worry should be firmly put to one side. If your Scouts weren't enjoying their Scouting, they wouldn't come and it may well be that many of them greatly prefer to be in a smaller than a larger group.

Secondly, if you are offering fun, challenge and adventure and giving your Scouts the opportunity to develop physically, socially, intellectually and spiritually, then regardless of what activities you do, you are achieving the Purpose of the Association.

And thirdly, always remember to be confident in adapting the Programme to suit your Troop's needs. This is not an invitation to bend the Rules of the Association but the opportunity to be realistic about the programme you offer.

Finally, if you are doing your best to offer a Balanced Programme to your Scouts that is helping them to develop, then you are doing a good job.