



Session One

Troop Meetings

Time Allowed

35 minutes

Teaching Objectives

- Explore the purposes of troop meetings.
- Discuss the value of using the troop meeting plan.
- Explain the importance of allowing a troop meeting to be planned, conducted, and reviewed by the boys themselves.
- Review the vital role a Scoutmaster plays by providing coaching, support, and leadership to Scouts.

Materials Needed

- *The Scoutmaster Handbook*, No. 33009A
- Troop Meeting Planning Sheet (from *The Scoutmaster Handbook*)
- Video projection equipment
- *Scoutmaster and Assistant Scoutmaster Leader Specific Training* video, No. AV02V015
- PowerPoint slides or overheads from CD, if desired
- Flipchart or other means of writing discussion notes
- Posters

Recommended Facility Layout

- Session meeting area. Each participant should have a comfortable place to sit, take notes, and organize written materials. That setting most often consists of tables, each accommodating six to eight participants forming a patrol, and enough chairs for all participants.

- Instructor-led discussion supported by video clips

Presentation Procedure

Do boys join Scouting just to attend troop meetings? The answer is probably no. Ask them and they'll say they joined to have fun, set out on adventures, make friends, learn new skills, and explore the outdoors.

Troop meetings can be the catalyst that makes all of that possible for boys, but for that to happen, the meetings must be fast-paced, interesting, and varied. They need to lead toward exciting troop activities in the outdoors. They need to be the glue that holds a troop together.

They can be all of that and more. During this presentation, we'll talk about what a Scoutmaster can do to ensure the success of troop meetings.

Why Have Troop Meetings?

Troop meetings serve many purposes, including these:

- Motivating boys
- Strengthening patrols
- Promoting patrol spirit
- Encouraging Scouts to learn and practice Scouting skills
- Allowing Scouts to exercise leadership

As a tool for delivering the promise of Scouting, Troop meetings are especially effective because they are planned, organized, and carried out by the boys themselves. Scouts take ownership in the meetings and are empowered to lead the events that make up each meeting.

Of course, Scouting gives boys the resources they need to make their troop meetings successful. As adult leaders, you can provide the support and guidance that will allow them to make the most of those resources.

Perhaps the most important resource for helping boys develop effective troop meetings is the tried-and-true method called the troop meeting plan.

Instructors' Note

Ask participants to open their Scoutmaster Handbooks to the blank Troop Meeting Plan form in Chapter 5, "Troop Meetings." They can use this as a reference during the discussion that follows.

The troop meeting plan is a format that has developed over many years of Scouting experience. It presents Scouts with a very effective way to put together troop meetings that are enjoyable, productive, and meaningful, and that stay within a reasonable timeframe.

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The meeting plan involves seven distinct steps:

- Preopening
- Opening
- Skills Instruction
- Patrol Meetings
- Interpatrol Activity
- Closing
- After the Meeting

Instructors' Note

In discussing the essential elements of a troop meeting, the following descriptions will be useful. Participants can also find this information in The Scoutmaster Handbook chapter on "Troop Meetings."

1. Preopening

As boys begin to arrive for a troop meeting, the senior patrol leader or an older Scout assigned by the senior patrol leader should get them involved in a game or project designed so that additional Scouts can join in as they show up. The preopening is often well-suited for the outdoors. The person in charge of the preopening activity should be ready to start at least 15 minutes before the scheduled beginning of the meeting. An assistant Scoutmaster may be assigned to coach and support the Scout leading the preopening. To keep meetings fresh, the pre-opening activity should not be the same every week.

Point out that participants have already taken part in a pre-opening activity—the get-acquainted game at the beginning of Session One. Instructors can use that example to highlight ways to ensure that a preopening is effective, enjoyable, and timely.

2. Opening—5 minutes

The senior patrol leader calls the meeting to order at the appointed time, instructing Scouts to line up in formation by patrols. A patrol responsible for the opening might conduct a flag ceremony and then lead troop members in reciting the Scout Oath and Law.

Instructors' Note

Take this opportunity to model an opening ceremony. Ask one of the patrols to serve as a color guard. As the color guard conducts the ceremony, guide them through the steps and explain to the group as a whole what is happening and how it can most effectively be done by Scouts in a troop. A typical ceremony can follow these guidelines: An instructor in the role of senior patrol leader directs, "Color guard, raise the colors." The patrol leader of the color guard takes charge, calling the members of the troop to attention, asking them to make the Scout salute, then instructing the color guard to advance and present the colors. After the flag has been placed in the flagpole holder at the front of the room (the color guard may also present a troop flag), the patrol leader leads the group in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and the Scout Oath and Law, then directs the color guard to retire. Variations on the opening ceremony may include other meaningful activities such as singing a patriotic song or presenting an historic American flag and explaining its history.

3. Skills Instruction—15 to 20 minutes

Skills instruction might focus on skills Scouts will need to fully participate in an upcoming activity or skills they must acquire for advancement. A troop with boys of about the same experience level could separate into patrols so that groups will be of a size that maximizes learning experiences. Troops with Scouts of various ages and expertise may organize instruction at three levels—basic information for the new-Scout patrol, more advanced instruction for regular patrols, and the most challenging level for the Venture patrol.

Instruction should be hands-on learning rather than lecturing. Those leading the sessions will be Scouts serving as troop instructors with expertise in a particular area (they should be well-prepared ahead of time), adult Scout leaders, or outside authorities willing to share their knowledge with the troop.

4. Patrol Meetings—5 to 20 minutes

After skills instruction, the senior patrol leader will announce that it is time for each patrol to go to its designated meeting area, usually in the same room (or outdoor area) as the troop meeting. Each patrol leader takes charge of his patrol's meeting.

Matters to be handled during a patrol meeting include taking attendance, collecting dues, planning the patrol's involvement in upcoming troop activities, selecting menus for hikes and campouts, assigning patrol members to specific tasks, and working out any other details for the smooth operation of the patrol. The length of the patrol meetings will depend upon how much business the patrols must handle.

5. Interpatrol Activity—15 to 20 minutes

Led by the senior patrol leader or an assistant senior patrol leader, this part of the meeting allows all the patrols to interact with one another in a competition or in a cooperative effort. The activity could be a game that tests the skills Scouts are learning for an upcoming event—a race by each patrol to set up a tent properly, for example, or for patrol members to tie a set of knots correctly. Games involving teamwork and ethical decision making may also be appropriate.

6. Closing—5 minutes

The closing is the Scoutmaster's portion of the meeting. The Scouts should be paying attention. It may help to dim the lights and have everyone seated. Deal with any outstanding business first—reminders for upcoming meetings, outings, etc. Congratulate any Scouts who have advanced since the last meeting. This is also a good time to praise Scouts for Good Turns, positive ethical decisions, and jobs well done.

The heart of the closing is the Scoutmaster's Minute—your opportunity to share a story based on Scouting's values. Use a personal experience if you can, or one of the many Scoutmaster Minutes found in the "Ready References" chapter of *The Scoutmaster Handbook*. The story should contain a thought for the Scouts to carry home with them. The closing may also include a simple ceremony, a song, or a prayer.

7. After the Meeting

At the end of the meeting, the service patrol for the week puts away any troop equipment and returns the room to its original condition.

Meanwhile, the senior patrol leader should meet briefly with members of the patrol leaders' council and the Scoutmaster to review the meeting, make plans for the next meeting, and decide which patrol will be the upcoming service patrol.

Troop Meeting Plan Resources

The Scoutmaster Handbook contains suggested troop meeting plans to fulfill some specific situations:

- **The New Troop's First Month**

Getting a new troop organized and under way requires more hands-on involvement by adult leaders than does a veteran troop with experienced youth leaders. The four troop meeting plans designed for a new troop will guide its Scoutmaster through the first month of meetings.

- **Program Features**

Later in Scoutmaster and Assistant Scoutmaster Leader Specific Training, we'll talk about long-range program planning for a troop. Chapter 6, "Program Features," of *The Scoutmaster Handbook* includes troop meeting plans for monthlong activities built around specific features—hiking, citizenship, first aid, and camping.

In three volumes, the BSA publication *Troop Program Features* contains guidelines for Scout involvement in an additional 36 exciting activities. Each feature includes the troop meeting plans to support that activity through a month of meetings and troop events.

Planning the troop's program for six months to a year in advance is an important part of offering an exciting, meaningful Scouting experience to boys. That aspect of troop leadership will be discussed more fully in Session Three of this training.

The Scoutmaster's Role in Troop Meetings

A troop meeting should be planned, organized, and run by the senior patrol leader, the patrol leaders, and other members of the troop. In fact, a Scoutmaster takes a prominent role in a troop meeting only three times:

- Offering the senior patrol leader support and guidance as the meeting begins.
- Sharing the Scoutmaster's Minute at the close of the meeting.

- Meeting with the senior patrol leader and members of the patrol leaders' council to assess the meeting and review plans for the next meeting of the troop.

At first glance that may not seem to be much involvement for the primary adult leader of a Scout troop. The fact is, though, that troop meetings operating this way are an indication that the Scoutmaster has utilized time and energy where it is most effective—in preparing young people to take on the leadership of their troop and of its meetings.

One of the times when the Scoutmaster's input is most appropriate is during the planning that occurs before a meeting. During Session Three of this training we will explore the long-range planning that the patrol leaders' council, with the guidance of the Scoutmaster, uses to develop a troop's monthly and annual program. For now, though, let's look in on a Scoutmaster meeting with a senior patrol leader to review the plans for a troop meeting that is about to begin.

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Video No. 1—Before the Meeting

This video shows a Scoutmaster meeting with a senior patrol leader as a troop meeting begins. Scouts in the background are taking part in the meeting's pre-opening activity. The Scoutmaster and senior patrol leader review the troop meeting plan, outlined on a page held by the senior patrol leader. The senior patrol leader assures the Scoutmaster that each step is prepared and that those responsible for each step are versed in what they will do.

Key to this video is the obvious supportive, coaching role of the Scoutmaster. The Scoutmaster allows the senior patrol leader to accept responsibility for the upcoming meeting. The Scoutmaster may have a suggestion or two that will aid the senior patrol leader in assuring the success of the meeting, but the Scoutmaster remains in a supportive, rather than directive, role. This is a boy-run troop; the Scoutmaster is at ease in allowing the senior patrol leader (and other youth members of the troop) to carry out the meeting plan.

DISCUSSION OF VIDEO NO. 1

Lead participants in a discussion of what they have just seen, using their questions and observations to reinforce the importance of giving boy leaders the tools they need and the supportive guidance to plan and conduct their own

meetings. Among questions that may be helpful in this discussion are these:

- What is the role is the Scoutmaster playing?
- What is the role of the senior patrol leader?
- How is the Scoutmaster relating to the senior patrol leader?
- What expectations does the Scoutmaster have of the youth leaders of the troop? In what ways will the meeting be a success?

Of course, no meeting will be perfect. Even with careful adherence to the troop meeting plan, there will be portions of some meetings that are not very successful.

The important thing to keep in mind, though, is that Scouts who are given the responsibility, resources, and support to plan and run their own troop meetings are learning extremely important lessons in leadership. Their growing confidence and advancing leadership abilities are a direct result of the efforts of their Scoutmaster to provide support and guidance and then, for the most part, staying behind the scenes.

Assessing a Troop Meeting

The review process that occurs immediately after a troop meeting offers a Scoutmaster a valuable opportunity to interact with the troop's youth leaders to assess their performance and to refine plans for the next troop gathering. Let's see how this happens in one troop.

Video No. 2—After the Meeting

The Scoutmaster supports the senior patrol leader as the senior patrol leader leads the group in a review of the just-completed troop meeting.

- They discuss what went well during the meeting, what could have been better, and how they can improve in the future.
- They also go over the troop plan for the next meeting to ensure that preparations have been made or will be made, and that at least one person is taking responsibility for the success of each portion of the upcoming meeting.
- They note which Scouts were missing from the meeting and make a plan for contacting each one to discover why the absence occurred. (This will be referenced during the discussion on membership in Session Three.)
- As the debriefing concludes, the senior patrol leader tells the Scoutmaster that he will call later in the week to bring the Scoutmaster up-to-date on preparations for the upcoming troop meeting.

The Scoutmaster's role in this video clip is, again, supportive. The boys themselves conduct the debriefing. The Scoutmaster can offer coaching, guidance, and encouragement but does not overstate his authority.

DISCUSSION OF VIDEO NO. 2

What was the role of the Scoutmaster in this scene? What was the role of the Scouts?

Ask participants to consider and comment on this question: How do you know if a troop meeting was successful? (Allow participants time to respond. Whenever possible, use their responses to lead toward the following ideas.)

By visiting informally with the patrol leaders' council after a troop meeting, a Scoutmaster can help the senior patrol leader guide the others in considering these points:

- Did we accomplish a purpose?
- Was the meeting fast-paced and fun?
- Did we do something new and different?
- What worked well that we can do again?
- Where do we stand in regard to next week's meeting?

The answers to these questions will help the troop's junior leaders as they refine the plans for future meetings and review the assignments to be sure that each portion of the next meeting will be fully prepared and presented.

At the conclusion of the assessment, the Scoutmaster offered positive reinforcement to the troop's youth leaders and let them know that their efforts were valuable and their skill as leaders was growing.

Video No. 3—Teaching the Senior Patrol Leader

Scoutmaster and senior patrol leader get together at the senior patrol leader's home—family members are in view. The session occurs some days before the first troop meeting that the senior patrol leader will lead. The Scoutmaster is discussing with the senior patrol leader the ways in which he can conduct the various parts of the meeting. The Scoutmaster will be in the background during the troop meeting but will always ready to help the senior patrol leader succeed. It is clear in the video that the Scoutmaster has great confidence in the senior patrol leader and is quite willing to remain on the sidelines while the senior patrol leader leads.

DISCUSSION OF VIDEO NO. 3

What is the role of the Scoutmaster in this scene? The role of the senior patrol leader?

Scoutmasters want their troop meetings to be successful, but they also want boys to succeed as leaders. What steps can Scoutmasters take to be sure that they are helping Scouts lead rather than taking too much of the lead themselves?

Note that the Scoutmaster did not meet privately with the senior patrol leader, but rather at the senior patrol leader's home with his parents present.

Presentation Summary

The framework offered by the troop meeting plan is a tool that helps shape a successful troop. It is most effective when adults remember that the BSA program is for boys. The best meetings are planned by its youth members, led by them, and assessed by them.

In the next presentation, we'll touch on some specific ways that Scoutmasters can work with boys, adjusting leadership styles to match various needs of individual boys and of the patrols and the troop acting as teams.

The key to successful troop meetings, though, and to delivering the Scouting program to boys, is to do all you can to empower Scouts to be the leaders of their patrols and their troop. Give them the direction and coaching they need to succeed, offer them opportunities to lead, then step back and allow them to learn leadership through hands-on experience. Supportive guidance and positive reinforcement on your part will do the rest.

The Scoutmaster Handbook chapter on "The Boy-Led Troop" includes a quote from the Chinese philosopher Sun-Tsu:

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"A leader is best when people barely know he exists; not so good when people obey and acclaim him; worse when they despise him. But a good leader who talks little when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say, 'We did it ourselves.'"

—Sun-Tsu

By using the troop meeting plan and by focusing energy on helping boys prepare themselves to organize and lead their own patrols and troop, a Scoutmaster can experience the greatest satisfaction of all—giving young people the confidence, the abilities, and the successes to proclaim that "we did it ourselves."

Open the discussion to questions and comments relating specifically to the material covered in this presentation.

Announce a five-minute break.

