

TROOP OPEN HOUSE

Recruit Youth ✦ *Retain Scouts*

The Boy Scout troop open house allows a troop to swing open its doors and roll out the red carpet to welcome guests. It provides a forum to show off Scouting activities and the troop's accomplishments. It is an effective tool to reach youth who have never tried Scouting.

Hosting a troop open house is a five-step process that has been tried and proven in troops throughout the nation. Each of the following five steps is vital to the event's success:

1. Present a school rally to fifth- and sixth-graders.
2. Mail the parents of interested youth a personal invitation to the troop open house.
3. Follow the invitation with a telephone call to the parents.
4. Host the troop open house for youth and their parents.
5. Organize a troop or district activity to involve new Scouts right away.

Youth join Scouting for the fun and outdoor adventure. Parents want them to join for completely different reasons—character building and leadership training. Following this plan for conducting a troop open house will help you address the wants and needs of both youth and their parents. Use the Troop Open House Planning Sheet to track your progress.

STEP I: Present the School Rally

- A. The Boy Scouts of America recommends that recruitment efforts be concentrated on fifth- and sixth-graders in early spring, as they approach Boy Scout age. Several resources can be used to spark their interest, including introducing youth to Scouting with an interactive presentation.
- B. Cooperation of schools is essential to gain access to Scout-age youth. Contact school administration to schedule presentation time during school with small groups of boys.
- C. Plan the presentation to highlight Scouting's activities, high adventure, and outdoor experiences. Display hands-on visuals such as backpacks, canoes, and tents, and allow the youth to check them out up close. Dress in outdoor wear to complete the setting. Allowing some experienced Scouts to assist in the presentation could help the youth visualize themselves as Scouts. The presentation should be no more than five minutes.
- D. Following the introductory presentation, give each youth a High-Adventure Survey, No. 34241. Ask them to check the high-adventure experiences that interest them. Explain that Scout troops do the kinds of activities listed on the survey.
- E. While the youth are working on their surveys, announce that you would like to invite them to join a Scout troop. Explain that they will receive an invitation to join a Scout troop in their community if they mark that they are interested in joining. Collect every survey, and check to ensure that each is complete with the youth's full name and contact information.
- F. If the school cannot allow assemblies with youth, suggest the alternative plan of having the school distribute the High-Adventure Survey. Be sure to pick up the completed surveys soon after their distribution.



STEP II: Mail the Invitation

- A. The next step involves following up on the initial contact with youth who indicated their desire to join a troop. The Scoutmaster should send a personal letter to the parents of each interested youth, spelling out the values of Scouting and extending an invitation for the youth and his parents to visit the troop at its upcoming open house. Include a Time Well Spent brochure, No. 02-341, or another brochure that describes Scouting's values, to provide further information.
- B. Timing is important. Mail the letter as soon as possible after the survey is completed; schedule the troop open house for the week after the family receives the invitation letter.
- C. Model your letter after the following sample:



Dear parent:

Your son has taken a step toward building a solid future; are you willing to support his growth?

Recently, your son indicated his desire to try his hand at such high-adventure activities as backpacking, cycling, camping, swimming, canoeing, rock climbing, and horseback riding. Our Scout troop will participate in these activities and even more in the coming year, and we would like to invite him to join the Boy Scouts of America.

Scouting has a reputation for helping youth develop self-reliance, strong character, respect for others, good citizenship skills, and physical and mental fitness. For almost a century, our programs have instilled in young men the values and knowledge that they need to become leaders in their communities and in their countries.

Please join our troop for our open house at (time) on (date) at (place). You'll get a firsthand look at some of our troop activities, and you can visit with our Scouts and their adult leaders. Take some time to look over the enclosed brochure, and bring any questions or concerns to the meeting.

I look forward to meeting you!

Sincerely,

Scoutmaster, Troop _____
Telephone no. _____

STEP III: Follow Up with a Call

- A. On the day or evening before the open house, each prospective Scout's household should receive a telephone call from a member of the troop, ideally the Scoutmaster, who sent the letter. As you make the call, keep in mind that the youth has already expressed his interest, so direct the call to a parent.
- B. To help put the parents at ease, ask the following questions:
 - ◆ Did the family receive the Scoutmaster's letter?
 - ◆ Does anyone in the family have previous Scouting experience?
 - ◆ Do they have any questions about Scouting or the troop open house?
 - ◆ Do they know the time and location of the troop open house?
- C. Ensure parents that you look forward to meeting them and will meet them at the door to greet everyone.

STEP IV: Host the Troop Open House

- A. The troop open house can be conducted as a districtwide event for a number of troops, or an individual troop can conduct one independently. The important idea to remember is that Scouting is showcased and each guest is made to feel welcome.
- B. Involve all troop members in the open house from the planning stage. Remind each Scout of the importance of building their troop; be receptive to their ideas. Begin making plans for the open house as early as possible, following these suggestions:
 - ◆ Prior to the night of the open house, involve the troop in sprucing up the meeting place. Treat the task as a "spring cleaning" since the troop will be welcoming guests.
 - ◆ Prepare a display of troop activities, photos, and awards that the troop has earned.
 - ◆ Assign greeters to be at the door to welcome guests as they arrive. Be sure to have adequate seating.

- ◆ Have a printed agenda and a copy of the troop's calendar at each seat.
 - ◆ Make assignments for each part on the agenda well in advance. The senior patrol leader should be the emcee of the meeting.
 - ◆ Prepare refreshments for your guests if you desire.
- C. The troop open house should follow an agenda, such as the one in this brochure, to help guests gather a broad range of Scouting information. The youth is introduced to basic Scouting skills while an adult troop leader informs the parents about Scouting's values and its positive effect on youth.
 - D. During the open house, Scouts and Scouters should do everything possible to make their guests feel comfortable and to answer each question as it arises. Be sure parents know they may ask questions at any time. The guests should be allowed to participate whenever possible.
 - E. At some point, the Scoutmaster should explain that both the youth and his parents may join the troop. Have applications available for both Scouts and adults.



Sample Troop Open House Agenda

Assign To:

1 Pre-opening

– *Conduct a simple action game for early arrivals.*

2 Opening

– *Hold the flag ceremony.*

– *Welcome the guests.*

3 Activity Time

A. Skill time for youth

– *Hot spark*

– *Knot relay*

– *Tent pitching*

B. Parent orientation

– *Explain the ideals and values of Scouting.*

– *Introduce the troop leadership and its organization.*

– *Distribute the troop calendar.*

– *Explain the summer camp opportunity.*

– *Thoroughly explain the costs of troop membership.*

4 Joining Process

– *Youth and parents complete applications to join Scouting.*

– *Announce information about the next troop meeting.*

5 Closing

– *Scoutmaster's Minute*

– *Closing ceremony*

6 Refreshments (optional)

STEP V: Organize a Troop or District Activity

During the initial contact with Scout-age youth, we promised that Scouting is action-packed. Youth will expect that adventure soon after they become Scouts, so schedule an exciting activity soon after the troop open house. Here are a few suggestions:

Troop Campout

New Scouts joined with the expectation of going camping, and they should be given this opportunity for outdoor activity as soon as possible after the troop open house. Begin planning the activity well before the troop open house so that the event is in place when the new Scouts join.

District-wide Overnighter

Some districts may choose to host all their troops for an overnighter at an area camp. The program could include basic Scouting skills, a campfire, and preparing a simple meal. The experience will quickly give new Scouts a sense of belonging and fulfill their expectations of an exciting adventure.

Lock-Ins

Lock-in events also have proven successful in some districts. Lock-ins, which are especially effective in colder climates, are more like "camp-ins" rather than the usual campout.

They can be set up at the local YMCA or school gymnasium.

Program possibilities could include swimming, sports, movies, refreshments, and a little sleeping.

Two-Deep Leadership

According to BSA Youth Protection policies, every BSA trip or outing involving Scout-age youth should be supervised by two BSA-registered adult leaders or one registered adult leader and a parent or guardian of a participant, one of whom must be at least 21 years of age. The chartered organization is responsible for ensuring that sufficient leadership is provided for all activities.

For more information on BSA Youth Protection, consult The Scoutmaster Handbook, No. 33009.

Get New Scouts Involved

New Scouts should be introduced into the mainstream of troop activities as soon as possible after they join the troop. Assign them to a new-Scout patrol and get them started on earning advancement. The Scoutmaster, assistant Scoutmaster, or troop guide should take responsibility for helping new Scouts get a good start.

Troop Open House Planning Sheet

District _____

Troop No.	School	Date of School Rally	Surveys Yes/No	Date Invitation Mailed	Date Phone Call Made	Date of Open House	No. New Scouts	No. New Adults	No. <i>Boy's Life</i> Subscriptions