

What Is Boy Scouting?

Purpose of the BSA

The Boy Scouts of America was incorporated to provide a program for community organizations that offers effective character, citizenship, and personal fitness training for youth.

Specifically, the BSA endeavors to develop American citizens who are physically, mentally, and emotionally fit; have a high degree of self-reliance as evidenced in such qualities as initiative, courage, and resourcefulness; have personal values based on religious concepts; have the desire and skills to help others; understand the principles of the American social, economic, and governmental systems; are knowledgeable about and take pride in their American heritage and understand our nation's role in the world; have a keen respect for the basic rights of all people; and are prepared to participate in and give leadership to American society.

Boy Scout Program Membership

Boy Scouting, one of the traditional membership divisions of the BSA, is available to boys who have earned the Arrow of Light Award or have completed the fifth grade, or who are 11 through 17 years old . The program achieves the BSA's objectives of developing character, citizenship, and personal fitness qualities among youth by focusing on a vigorous program of outdoor activities.

Boy Scout program membership, as of December 31, 2001, is:

1,005,592 Boy Scouts/Varsity Scouts

537,685 Adult Volunteers

52,425 Troops/Teams

Volunteer Scouters

Thousands of volunteer leaders, both men and women, are involved in the Boy Scouting program. They serve in a variety of jobs—everything from unit leaders to chairmen of troop committees, committee members, merit badge counselors, and chartered organization representatives.

Like other phases of the program, Boy Scouting is made available to community organizations having similar interests and goals. Chartered organizations include professional organizations; governmental bodies; and religious, educational, civic, fraternal, business, labor, and citizens' groups. Each organization appoints one of its members as the chartered organization representative. The organization is responsible for leadership, the meeting place, and support for troop activities.

Who Pays for It?

Several groups are responsible for supporting Boy Scouting: the boy and his parents, the troop, the chartered organization, and the community. Boys are encouraged to earn money whenever possible to pay their own expenses, and they also contribute dues to their troop treasuries to pay for budgeted items. Troops obtain additional income by working on approved money-earning projects. The community, including parents, supports Scouting through the United Way, Friends

of Scouting campaigns, bequests, and special contributions to the BSA local council. This income provides leadership training, outdoor programs, council service centers and other facilities, and professional service for units.

Aims and Methods of the Scouting Program

The Scouting program has three specific objectives, commonly referred to as the “Aims of Scouting.” They are character development, citizenship training, and personal fitness.

The methods by which the aims are achieved are listed below in random order to emphasize the equal importance of each.

Ideals

The ideals of Boy Scouting are spelled out in the [Scout Oath, the Scout Law, the Scout motto, and the Scout slogan](#). The Boy Scout measures himself against these ideals and continually tries to improve. The goals are high, and as he reaches for them, he has some control over what and who he becomes.

Patrols

The patrol method gives Boy Scouts an experience in group living and participating citizenship. It places responsibility on young shoulders and teaches boys how to accept it. The patrol method allows Scouts to interact in small groups where members can easily relate to each other. These small groups determine troop activities through elected representatives.

Outdoor Programs

Boy Scouting is designed to take place outdoors. It is in the outdoor setting that Scouts share responsibilities and learn to live with one another. In the outdoors the skills and activities practiced at troop meetings come alive with purpose. Being close to nature helps Boy Scouts gain an appreciation for the beauty of the world around us. The outdoors is the laboratory in which Boy Scouts learn ecology and practice conservation of nature’s resources.

Advancement

Boy Scouting provides a series of surmountable obstacles and steps in overcoming them through the advancement method. The Boy Scout plans his advancement and progresses at his own pace as he meets each challenge. The Boy Scout is rewarded for each achievement, which helps him gain self-confidence. The steps in the advancement system help a Boy Scout grow in self-reliance and in the ability to help others.

Associations With Adults

Boys learn a great deal by watching how adults conduct themselves. Scout leaders can be positive role models for the members of the troop. In many cases a Scoutmaster who is willing to listen to boys, encourage them, and take a sincere interest in them can make a profound difference in their lives.

Personal Growth

As Boy Scouts plan their activities and progress toward their goals, they experience personal growth. The Good Turn concept is a major part of the personal growth method of Boy Scouting. Boys grow as they participate in community service projects and do Good Turns for others. Probably no device is as successful in developing a basis for personal growth as the daily Good Turn. The religious emblems program also is a large part of the personal growth method. Frequent personal conferences with his Scoutmaster help each Boy Scout to determine his growth toward Scouting’s aims.

Leadership Development

The Boy Scout program encourages boys to learn and practice leadership skills. Every Boy Scout has the opportunity to participate in both shared and total leadership situations.

Understanding the concepts of leadership helps a boy accept the leadership role of others and guides him toward the citizenship aim of Scouting.

Uniform

The uniform makes the Boy Scout troop visible as a force for good and creates a positive youth image in the community. Boy Scouting is an action program, and wearing the uniform is an action that shows each Boy Scout's commitment to the aims and purposes of Scouting. The uniform gives the Boy Scout identity in a world brotherhood of youth who believe in the same ideals. The uniform is practical attire for Boy Scout activities and provides a way for Boy Scouts to wear the badges that show what they have accomplished.

Outdoor Activities

Local councils operate and maintain Scout camps. The National Council operates high-adventure areas at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico, the Northern Tier National High Adventure Program in Minnesota and Canada, and the Florida National High Adventure Sea Base in the Florida Keys . About 70 councils also operate high-adventure programs.

The BSA conducts a national Scout jamboree every four years and participates in world Scout jamborees (also held at four-year intervals). Fort A.P. Hill, Virginia, was the site of the 2001 National Scout Jamboree.

The Beginning of Scouting

Scouting, as known to millions of youth and adults, evolved during the early 1900s through the efforts of several men dedicated to bettering youth. These pioneers of the program conceived outdoor activities that developed skills in young boys and gave them a sense of enjoyment, fellowship, and a code of conduct for everyday living.

In this country and abroad at the turn of the century, it was thought that children needed certain kinds of education that the schools couldn't or didn't provide. This led to the formation of a variety of youth groups, many with the word "Scout" in their names. For example, Ernest Thompson Seton, an American naturalist, artist, writer, and lecturer, originated a group called the Woodcraft Indians and in 1902 wrote a guidebook for boys in his organization called the *Birch Bark Roll*. Meanwhile in Britain, Robert Baden-Powell, after returning to his country a hero following military service in Africa, found boys reading the manual he had written for his regiment on stalking and survival in the wild. Gathering ideas from Seton, America's Daniel Carter Beard, and other Scoutcraft experts, Baden-Powell rewrote his manual as a nonmilitary skill book, which he titled *Scouting for Boys*. The book rapidly gained a wide readership in England and soon became popular in the United States . In 1907, when Baden-Powell held the first campout for Scouts on Brownsea Island off the coast of England, troops were spontaneously springing up in America .

William D. Boyce, a Chicago publisher, incorporated the Boy Scouts of America in 1910 after meeting with Baden-Powell. (Boyce was inspired to meet with the British founder by an unknown Scout who led him out of a dense London fog and refused to take a tip for doing a Good Turn.) Immediately after its incorporation, the BSA was assisted by officers of the YMCA in organizing a task force to help community organizations start and maintain a high-quality Scouting program. Those efforts climaxed in the organization of the nation's first Scout camp at Lake George, New York, directed by Ernest Thompson Seton. Beard, who had established another youth group, the Sons of Daniel Boone (which he later merged with the BSA), provided assistance. Also on hand for this historic event was James E. West, a lawyer and an advocate of children's rights, who later would become the first professional Chief Scout Executive of the Boy Scouts of America. Seton became the first volunteer national Chief Scout, and Beard, the first national Scout Commissioner.

Publications

The BSA publishes the *Boy Scout Handbook* (more than 37 million copies of which have been printed); the *Patrol Leader Handbook*, which offers information relevant to boy leadership; the *Scoutmaster Handbook*; more than 100 merit badge pamphlets dealing with hobbies, vocations, and advanced Scoutcraft; and program features and various kinds of training, administrative, and organizational manuals for adult volunteer leaders and Boy Scouts. In addition, the BSA publishes *Boys' Life* magazine, the national magazine for all boys (magazine circulation is more than 1.3 million) and *Scouting* magazine for volunteers, which has a circulation of 900,000.

Conservation

Conservation activities supplement the program of Boy Scout advancement, summer camp, and outdoor activities and teaches young people to better understand their interdependence with the environment.

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The Boy Scouts of America

<http://www.scouting.org>