
RECRUITING COMMISSIONERS



THE ROLE OF RECRUITING

The vision is clear: Unit Service will enable units to better serve more youth by providing an adequate number of trained commissioners who provide a link to district committees in support of a quality unit program.

“Adequate” isn’t easy. It means there are enough commissioners to support each and every unit in a district our council. That’s a challenge: new units are

created, volunteers take on another role or move away, new opportunities for Unit Service arise. There’s not a council – or a district – in the BSA that doesn’t need additional commissioners.

As a result, recruiting is a continuous, year-round process; we should be continually looking for candidates to strengthen our team. Recruiting is more than just asking someone to serve.

IT STARTS WITH A VISION

Effective recruiting starts with a vision.

Every administrative commissioner should have a vision for their term of service: a picture of what success will look like when that term is finished.

A starting point should be our national vision for Unit Service:

Unit Service will enable units to better serve more youth by providing an adequate number of trained commissioners who provide a link to district operating committee resources in support of a quality unit program.

A council commissioner’s vision should support our national vision **and** be responsive to local needs. A district commissioner’s vision should support the council’s **and** be responsive to district needs. Interlocking administrative commissioners’ visions increase our ability to deliver effective service to units.

An administrative commissioner’s vision and the goals established to enable its fulfillment will help identify recruiting needs as it will help identify the both numbers of commissioners and the unique skills needed.

IDENTIFYING NEEDS

Conversations about recruiting commissioners may start with one question, “what makes a great commissioner?” But when those conversations involve administrative commissioners, it usually isn’t long before another question arises: “how do I build my team?” Often, that leads to a request for the rest of that list of skills and experience that a great Unit Service candidate should have. In fact, the rest of that list comes from work done before recruiting begins.

Consider four fundamental organizational concepts:

1. *You cannot do it alone* – administrative commissioners are team leaders; they need the help of a team of equally-committed volunteers.
2. *Form follows function* – it’s a bit like Shaker furniture. The Shaker’s didn’t build elaborate furniture with intricate design and decoration. It was simple and utilitarian. Many find elegance in its simplicity; regardless, at the end of the day one thing was certain: it got the job done.
3. *The composition of an administrative commissioner’s team flows from two places: (1) the role and responsibilities of that administrative commissioner, and, (2) their vision for their term of service.*
4. *There is no pre-defined structure* – the structure of the team, and the skills and experience needed by its members, is fluid and flexible. Those all respond to the nature of the work to be done.

The structure of the team is defined by the work to be done.

Similarly, the knowledge, skills, and experience needed by each member of the team is defined by the work they will be doing. The list for unit commissioners, for example, is different from the list for roundtable commissioners. Both lists may have common elements, but each will likely have unique components, too. And not all commissioners in a certain position will share the same list. The knowledge and experience of the ideal candidate to serve as a unit commissioner for a Pack, for example, might well be a bit different from the list for the ideal candidate to serve a Team.

Not all commissioners are alike. There are different types needed to build an effective Unit Service team:

- **Unit commissioners** are on the front lines; they provide service to units. They are our primary resource to ensure we’re accomplishing our five objectives:
 - Supporting unit growth and retention through the journey to excellence.

- Making meaningful unit contacts that capture in commissioner tools their strengths, needs, and a unit service plan that enables continuing improvement.
- Linking unit needs to district operating committee and other resources.
- Supporting timely unit, district, and council charter renewals.
- Supporting unit leaders by delivering effective roundtables that provide program ideas, relationship development, and timely communication.
- **Roundtable commissioners** provide continuous training to our unit leaders. The district training committee and, increasingly, our BSA Learn Center, provide the position-specific training unit leaders need, but roundtable is the place for them to keep current on district and council news and opportunities, learn best practices for delivering a top-quality program, and expand their Scouting network.
- **Administrative commissioners** manage the process of Unit Service. They ensure our commissioners know and use our contemporary tools and techniques to help our units better serve more youth, that we allocate available resources most effectively, and that we're continually recruiting to have that adequate number of trained commissioners we need.

It's important to remember that we need both *"specialists" and "generalists"* in each of those categories:

- Sometimes we need a commissioner with wide knowledge and experience to serve multiple types of units. But that's not always the case.
- Serving a unit at risk (a new unit or one with an assessment of 2.5 or less) is different from serving an established, successful one and requires different knowledge and skills.
- Perhaps we need someone to champion a new tool or process, such as Commissioner Tools or the Unit Service Plan. That would require different knowledge and skills, too.
- There may be a need for someone to format and analyze data available in Commissioner Tools and elsewhere – yet another area of knowledge and expertise.
- Or how about serving Ships? Or Posts or Clubs?

Consideration of these factors will enable identification of key elements of a recruiting plan:

- What types of commissioners are needed
 - Administrative?
 - Unit?
 - Roundtable?
 - Specialists?
 - Generalists?
- How many of each type are needed?
- Where are they needed?
 - The council commissioner's cabinet?
 - District Unit Service teams?

Analysis of a council's – or a district's – Unit Service strengths and needs will help identify the types and numbers of commissioners needed. Assessing the existing team is an important part

of this analysis. Some volunteers currently registered in a Unit Service position may not be engaged: professional or personal commitments may be barriers, unit service may not be a good fit for them, or they may simply need a new opportunity in Scouting to revitalize them. Identifying those needs for change increases the accuracy of estimates of the types and numbers of commissioners needed.

Once those questions are answered, it's also possible to begin development of an organizational structure. A key assumption in that is how many direct reports each administrative commissioner can manage effectively. For an assistant district commissioner, five – seven unit commissioners may be appropriate. Regardless, work load assumptions will help identify the number of administrative commissioners needed and that help in development of an organizational structure.

Our ability to provide the knowledge needed will be supported by commissioner orientation, training, and onboarding modules available in the BSA Learn Center. In addition, our new requirements for commissioner awards and recognition provide a clear definition of what success looks like for various Unit Service positions. Increasingly, our focus in identifying candidates will become the skills needed and a candidate's passion and priorities, rather than prior experience and training.

In short, there is no “cookie cutter” approach to building a Unit Service team. The composition of the team is defined by the work to be done.

IDENTIFYING CANDIDATES

Successful recruiting is more than simply asking someone to serve; there's a process that leads up to an ask that, when followed, leads to greater success in recruiting. It also leads to better unit service because it results in recruiting people best-qualified to serve as commissioners.

Elements of the process include:

- **Preparation**
Successful recruitment begins with a vision: how will you – and the person you've identified – know if they have been successful? Increasingly, we have metrics available to identify where Unit Service is most needed. Those metrics can also help measure progress – and success. Before making an ask, write down, specifically, what success will look like. And, make a **reasonable** estimate of how much time it will take to do the job in question. The best candidates will ask you about both; be prepared to answer.
- **Passion**
We've all heard it: if we find work we love, we'll never work another day in our life; that's passion! Our dedicated volunteers are passionate about Scouting, but when you get down to the details, they're not all passionate about the same things. Some **really** want to be on the front lines and work directly with the youth; but that may mean helping them work on merit badges, or it may mean taking them backpacking, or

perhaps teaching them to swim. Dedicated Scouters understand the importance of Unit Service, but all of them don't have a passion for it. A bit of homework will help identify a candidate's passion; if it doesn't match with your vision, the chances of successful recruitment drop significantly.

- **Potential**

Passion is one thing, potential is something entirely different. While perhaps hard to understand, some people have a passion for something they're not particularly good at. More homework: what is your candidate **really** good at? Does it match up with your vision? If so, your chances of success rise dramatically.

- **Priorities**

Strange as it sounds, we don't always control our priorities. A candidate with both passion and potential for the work you need done may have 6-month-old twins at home, or may have recently accepted a promotion that will require heavy travel with a burdensome workload for the next 12 months. As a general rule, volunteers should be given the chance to decide whether or not they have the time to do what you need done, but your wisdom is needed, too. Sometimes it is evident that we're asking more than anyone can reasonably be expected to give. That, too, requires a bit of homework.

- **Poaching**

Don't do it!

Even if you've found the **perfect** candidate – their passion, potential, and priorities all align with your vision – don't make the ask until you do one more bit of homework: are they already doing a great job in Scouting for someone else? If so, your first call needs to be to their current leader. Sometimes you'll learn the current assignment is close to a conclusion, or that there is a way for your candidate to do both jobs. But sometimes you'll find that recruiting that candidate for your job will damage our efforts to build Scouting in another area. It's tough to pass on the perfect candidate, but Scouting will be better for it.

Candid conversations with peer district or council leaders can help establish mutual "no poaching" commitments which can strengthen recruiting for all.

Spend time in **Preparation**; assess **Passion, Potential, and Priorities; Don't Poach**. It takes a bit more time than just making an ask, but the youth we serve through Scouting will be better off.

SCREENING FOR PASSION AND POTENTIAL



Paul Evans (paulbevans.com) offers a slightly different perspective that helps focus on the significance of **Passion** and **Potential** in identifying great candidates for Unit Service.

Preparation – identifying what success will look like for a volunteer who accepts a Unit Service position remains a critical first step. But once that's done, it's essential to consider what skills (**Potential**) an ideal candidate would have and what they really like – and don't like - to do (**Passion**).

It's no surprise that volunteers excel when doing things at which they're really good and truly enjoy. That work is a **Thrill** for them; they look forward to it. When we identify and successfully recruit a volunteer who has both the **Passion** and the **Potential** to fill an available position, success is almost inevitable.

While not as good a fit – at least at the start – a volunteer with **Potential** but lacking **Passion** could become a solid addition to the team. Volunteers with the necessary skills who are also committed to Scouting's values and mission often understand the need to take on an assignment that may focus more on **Skill**. And since they are good at what they are being asked to do and committed to Scouting, it wouldn't be unusual for them to find the new opportunity to be rewarding and enjoyable. In this situation, the best approach may be to suggest the candidate give the opportunity a try for six months and then jointly reevaluate it.

It's also no surprise that volunteers don't excel at things they aren't good at and don't enjoy. Those who attempt to take on an assignment for which they have **Passion** but lack **Potential** are likely to be frustrated when success escapes them. They are ill-prepared for the task they've taken on and will likely feel **Ill** (cranky or unhappy) before long. It's not a formula for good unit service.

When both **Passion** and **Potential** are lacking, the volunteer never should be offered the position. If we don't **Kill** consideration of them as a candidate, they should **Kill** it by rejecting the opportunity.

We know the objectives upon which commissioners must be focused:

1. Supporting unit growth and retention through the journey to excellence.
2. Making meaningful unit contacts that capture in commissioner tools their strengths, needs, and a unit service plan that enables continuing improvement.

3. Linking unit needs to district operating committee and other resources.
4. Supporting timely unit, district, and council charter renewals.
5. Supporting unit leaders by delivering effective roundtables that provide program ideas, relationship development, and timely communication.

And we also know the contemporary tools and techniques that enable success:

1. The Unit Performance Guide Methodology
2. The Unit Key 3
3. The Unit Service Plan
4. Commissioner Tools
5. Journey to Excellence
6. Continuous Recruiting
7. New member Coordinators
8. Assigning available resources to the greatest needs

When we know what success looks like and recruit volunteers who have the **Passion** and **Potential** to achieve our objectives using our contemporary tools and techniques, we'll provide great unit service and help our units better serve more youth through Scouting.

THE ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTIC

It has been said that success isn't just about what we can accomplish in our lives; it's about what we inspire others to do.

The best commissioners are servant-leaders. The phrase "servant leadership" was coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in "The Servant as Leader," an essay he first published in 1970. In that essay, Greenleaf wrote: "The servant-leader is servant first.... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. The conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. A servant-leader focuses primarily on the growth and well-being of people and communities to which they belong. The servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible."

Those with a servant's heart demonstrate certain characteristics that enable them to be great commissioners:

- ✓ Effective Listening – they seek to understand what a speaker is saying to them, demonstrate their interest, and provide feedback.
- ✓ Empathy – they can understand and share the feelings of the one with whom they are speaking.
- ✓ Vision – they can assess current strengths and needs and then envision and communicate a future that builds upon the former and addresses the latter.
- ✓ Persuasion – they can translate vision into action; they can cause people to believe in and work towards fulfilling a vision.

- ✓ Accountability – they spend their time celebrating others’ success and looking for ways to improve performance rather than in offering criticism. When issues arise, they take responsibility publicly and work privately to avoid recurrence.
- ✓ Team Orientation – they build teams and engage them in creating and fulfilling a vision; they seek opportunities to enable team members to grow and develop knowledge and networks that will enable greater success.

Those with a servant’s heart are comfortable with and prepared to demonstrate the characteristics of “2nd Century Service:”

- ✓ Visioning
- ✓ Continuous improvement
- ✓ Engagement
- ✓ Collaboration
- ✓ Linkage
- ✓ Transparency

Scouting experience isn’t required to be a commissioner. We can efficiently and effectively teach great candidates what they need to know and assign them initially to roles where they can learn and develop. Our orientation and onboarding processes for new commissioners were designed to support that.

We can train any candidate with the right passion, potential, and priorities to provide effective unit service, **but only if they have a servant’s heart**. We can’t teach that, so it must be a part of your definition of success for every position you recruit to fill.

WHERE TO LOOK

Once we know **what** we’re looking for, finding candidates is somewhat easier. Knowing **what** we’re looking for helps identify **where** to search:

- Units
Engaged unit commissioners get to know unit leaders; when they know our recruiting needs, they can help identify candidates. They can also capture those leads in the Detailed Assessment function in Commissioner Tools so that they can be reviewed by administrative commissioners on a report designed for that purpose.
- Charter Partners
Our charter partners have a vested interest in the quality of unit leadership; as a result, they can be a great referral source.
- Scouting Organizations
Organizations within Scouting, such as the National Eagle Scout Association (NESA), Order of the Arrow, and Scouting alumni groups have members who are already familiar with Scouting and committed to helping it grow and serve youth.
- Professions that attract servant-leaders

Teaching (including home-schooling), counseling, nursing, first-responders, among others, are all sources. Targeting organizations that attract people who know and love Scouting and tend to be servant-leaders significantly increases recruiting success.

- **Friendstorming**
Conducting a Friendstorming session can be an excellent way to identify potential candidates. While it certainly will identify individuals who are already involved in Scouting, it can also be an effective tool in identifying those who have never been involved, or those who were active in the past but aren't currently. Collecting names is the easy part, however. Essential to success is capturing key data (contact information; Scouting experience; indicators of potential, passion, and priorities; indicators of servant-leader orientation; references; Scouters to whom a candidate can't say "no"). Equally essential is a plan of action for each viable candidate. That should include follow-up calls by the responsible administrative commissioner to available references to assist in assessing candidates and planning to make an ask, if appropriate.
- **Roster Mining**
Reviewing unit rosters for current and prior years can enable identification of candidates. One example would be parents who were registered in a pack in alternate years (an indicator that both are committed to Scouting), but there are many others.

MAKING THE ASK

Once you've decided who to ask, decide what to ask them for. Have a job description in hand (including time commitment). Be specific, be honest.

Ask someone who has influence with your candidate to go with you. This could be someone that was in the same unit they were at the same time. It might be a mutual friend or a colleague. We all have someone in Scouting we have a hard time saying "no" to. Find that person with influence, visit with them in advance about why you think this is a good idea and seek their input prior to making the ask and invite them to go along to support it.

If they agree, develop a strategy. What are the touchpoints with Scouting that the candidate has? What will the candidate gain if he/she says "yes"? Decide on two or three things to talk about during the meeting.

Consider the typical excuses. Come up with ways to remove those obstacles.

Develop the "ask question." It should include not only what you want them to do, but the personal benefits of doing it – more on that in a minute.

Consider this: there are only three fundamental reasons that people volunteer: influence, fellowship, achievement. In preparing to make the ask, make certain that you cover all three points; don't try to determine in advance which will be most attractive. If you cover all three, your candidate will focus on the one that is meaningful. If you address only one and miss their passion, your chances of success drop dramatically.

Make a face to face appointment with the candidate. Take your time, make sure everyone is comfortable and begin your discussion. Make the ask.

If the answer is "no", follow up with a phone call or note to thank them for their time. Keep the relationship alive. And you and your partner should reflect on why you got a "no". Wrong job for this individual? Right job, wrong time? You might want to go back to this individual at another time.

If the answer was, "maybe," begin a "go-along". Invite them to a meeting, invite them to go with an experienced commissioner to make a unit contact. Demonstrate that the task isn't overwhelming and that you are there to support and train them. Then when the timing is right, ask again.

If "yes", follow up with a letter. Begin the "go-along". Get them trained. Match them with a unit or whatever job you had in mind for them.

The key is to follow up. Regardless of the answer, follow up. It will pay dividends in the long run.

WHAT NOT TO DO

In addition to other skills of value to commissioners, objectivity is essential. As a result:

- Don't ask units to provide their own commissioners.
- Don't assign unit commissioners to their own units or chartered organizations.

It takes longer for someone not associated with a unit to develop knowledge of it and build the relationships with its leaders essential to effective unit service, but unit commissioners who can objectively assist unit leaders in conducting a collaborative assessment of unit strengths and needs and developing a Unit Service Plan responsive to them will be most effective in helping the unit better serve more youth through Scouting.

BUILDING AND WORKING A RECRUITING PLAN

It's an old adage: "Plan the work and work the plan."

And it's one worth considering when thinking about recruiting commissioners. We know the tools and techniques that work best, but too often they don't deliver what is needed: "an adequate number of trained commissioners who provide a link to district committees in support of a quality unit program." The reason? Too often, there isn't a plan to put those tools and techniques to work; or we don't work the plan.

What does a commissioner recruiting plan look like?

- ***It starts with a vision***

It's impossible to determine the resources needed without knowing the objective. A clear, concise vision defines success and enables identifying the resources needed to achieve it.

- ***It's data-based***

The necessary research has been done to identify how many of what types of units must be served today **and** how many new units are planned to be added during the coming year. Equally important, the number of *active, engaged* commissioners already on the team is known. The numbers and types of commissioners needed have been identified.

- ***It's SMART***

It includes goals that are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**esource based, and **T**ime oriented.

Most of those terms are probably familiar, “Resource based” may not be. The point is that our plan needs to identify how many of what type of commissioners with what skills are needed. Recruiting volunteers with strong administrative skills who aren't most comfortable building relationships and working in teams may not be the best approach to finding new unit commissioners. A volunteer with a servant's heart and knowledge and experience with Cub Scouting probably isn't the best candidate to serve a Ship.

“Time oriented” is critical; hitting that goal ensures we're adding the commissioners needed, since the plan includes specific dates for meeting our goals.

- ***It's dynamic***

Things change. Some volunteers will move on to other opportunities and will need to be replaced. Additional new units may be created (a good thing!). A recruiting plan must respond to changing needs.

- ***It's integrated***

Good recruiting plans require leadership; for commissioners, that means they start with a council commissioner who establishes an over-all plan.

Each district should have a plan that responds to its specific needs **and** supports the council plan and ensures its success.

- ***It's written***

It doesn't matter whether on paper or in an electronic medium, but the plan must be reduced to writing.

- ***It's public***

Recruiting commissioners is a shared responsibility. Every commissioner should know the plan and contribute to it. Engaged unit commissioners, for example, are in their units and can identify volunteers who might be great candidates; effective roundtable commissioners work with leaders from throughout the

district and may also have recommendations. Both build relationships that may be valuable in asking a qualified candidate to serve.

But at the end of the day, the best possible recruiting plan is still only a plan.

Successful recruiting of commissioners requires that we create a plan, but it also requires that we work it!

RESOURCES

- Identifying Candidates
 - Friendstorming
 - http://www.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/510-003_WB.pdf
 - Roster Review: Searching for Commissioner Candidates
 - https://www.scouting.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Roster-Review_Searching-for-Commissioner-Candidates-FINAL.pdf
- Orientation, Onboarding, and Training Commissioners – BSA Learn Center
 - <https://my.scouting.org/>
- Commissioner Awards and Recognition Website
 - <https://www.scouting.org/commissioners/recognition/>
- Capturing Unit Service candidates in Commissioner Tools – BSA Learn Center
 - <https://my.scouting.org/>
 - Key Segment:
 - The Detailed Assessment for Commissioners
- Structuring a Team
 - <https://www.scouting.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Structuring-a-Team-FINAL.pdf>