

INCREASING COMMISSIONER ENGAGEMENT FOR UNIT SUCCESS

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June 2022

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To the Doctoral Candidate Review Board:

I am submitting herewith a Dissertation written by Ruth H. Davis, entitled "Ways to boost morale and growth in the number of engaged commissioners to attain successful unit". I have examined the final copy of this report for format and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Commissioner Science.

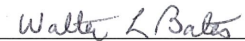
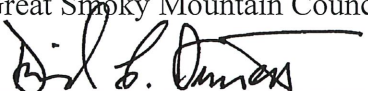
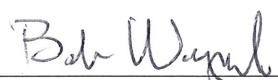


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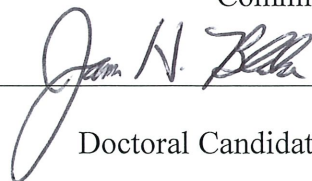
We have read this Dissertation and recommend its acceptance:


Blue Ridge Council
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Georgia-Carolina Council


Great Smoky Mountain Council
Palmetto Council
Piedmont Council
Sequoyah Council

Accepted for the Piedmont-Appalachian College of
Commissioner Science:



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To God be the glory for a special person that took time to help me maintain focus throughout this process. Your patience and keen eye have been invaluable. Thank you for all you have done.

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ABSTRACT

The worldwide pandemic, Scouting scandals and other issues have created barriers to the success of Scouting units. Some of these barriers, including health fears, financial hardships and meeting location shutdowns, have caused units to pause or cease operating. However, more active and engaged commissioners can help turn things around.

One may wonder what it takes for commissioners to be engaged and successful during this time. Commissioners must depend on knowledge gained from consistent training and years of leadership to cut through the confusion that can so easily spread during difficult times. When the assigned unit requires additional information, or the charter organization asks questions about the future of Scouts, commissioners should be prepared to answer in timely manner.

It is crucial for commissioners to actively visit units, identify safe meeting spaces and train Scout leaders. These commissioners can also utilize new channels of communication to let their communities know that units are operating safely amid COVID-19 and are still providing an excellent training ground for preparing young people to become responsible citizens. Advances in technology now provide easy access to Scouting information through websites, email, newsletters, Facebook, and other social media platforms. Commissioners can utilize these tools to quickly find and distribute guidance to their units.

However, technology is not the answer to every problem. Sometimes networking with professional and volunteer leaders is the best route. A unit is more likely to succeed with a confident, well-trained leader who knows where to turn to find additional resources and support in a timely manner.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The mission of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) continues to stand strong after 111 years. Its roots were planted by William D. Boyce, who during a trip to London, was inspired by an encounter with a boy Scout. Boyce then sought out and met with Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the World Scouting Movement. Boyce returned home and incorporated the Boy Scouts of America on February 8, 1910 (1). He aligned the organization with Baden-Powell's established mission of "preparing young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law: "(2). Every Scout, volunteer and staff member pledge his/her dedication to this mission when applying to join the Scouting family. It has become the foundation upon which all units guide and encourage young people to become responsible citizens.

My journey to becoming a commissioner began as a Scouting parent. I became involved when my sons and their friends became Scouts. It was a wonderful experience to see them grow and mature; it truly excited me to become a Scout leader. As some of them advanced to Eagle Scouts and completed their final projects, I had to make the decision that many other parent leaders make: Would I continue in Scouting? I answered "yes," and served in the Scouting family for years until I was asked to become a commissioner.

However, it has been my observation that many parent Scout leaders decide to leave after their children leave Scouts. I believe that one way to keep some of these experienced Scouting

leaders engaged beyond their own child's journey is by inviting them to serve as commissioners. With additional training, they can be well suited for this role as a support system for unit leaders. Their experience as parents also makes them excellent recruiters for new Scouts and unit leaders. They can help uphold the mission of BSA as commissioners by encouraging and guiding units as well as providing correction, when needed, to realign a unit or leader with Scouting values.

Serving as a commissioner requires dedication, commitment, and time away from the family home. Over the last several years, the amount of time required toward Scouting increased as Scout membership grew. Thus, many commissioners were tasked with overseeing extra units. Then in 2020, Covid-19 spread into a worldwide pandemic. As a result of potential health risks, many commissioners were unable to conduct visits and complete reports.

Amidst these difficulties, Scouting leaders can continue to fulfill the purpose of BSA by providing the education and programs needed to build stronger character. In order to do that, commissioners need to be confident in their leadership and provide careful and consistent guidance. I identified a strong need to help commissioners with this task by first re-educating new and experienced commissioners about their roles and responsibilities. Then, I sought to address ways to increase commissioners' engagement without overloading them with more units than they can handle with the time and attention needed. In pursuing this mission, I determined how critical it is to recruit more parents that have a heart towards Scouting, from dens to commissioner, while limiting their assignment to two to four units.

In order to examine the methods for increased commissioner engagement, the role and structure of BSA leadership will first be established. The purpose of a commissioner is to be a silent friend who keeps a watchful eye on all the units in his/her district. The commissioner is a supporter who actively listens to units and chartered organizations. This Scouting ally regularly encourages the success of his/her units by communicating information from the council to the units and relaying unit feedback to the council. This important relationship preserves the Scouting mission by empowering Scout leaders to prepare Scouts to make ethical and moral choices as they take their place in society as responsible citizens. The commissioner also serves as a partner with the professional executive staff and provides guidance to the administrative volunteers. Listed below is a summary of the various commissioner roles (3).

Role of District Commissioner

- Represent a district (geographic area)
- Work closely with District Executive
- Communicate with all units within an assigned area
- Recruit enough commissioners to serve
- Conduct personal coaching/orientation sessions
- Provide guidance for unit service needs
- Hold monthly meetings
- Assist with unit event planning
- Create unit service plans
- Help unit commissioners evaluate/improve unit performance
- Track re-charter status of all units
- Review health of units and commissioner activity
- Monitor roundtable attendance
- Recognize accomplishments

Role of Assistant Commissioner

- Work closely with District Executive and provide support to district commissioner with their responsibilities as outlined above.

Role of Unit Commissioner

- Build relationships with assigned units
- Attend district, commissioners and roundtable monthly meetings
- Ensure units have trained leaders
- Report relevant meeting information to units
- Serve as the watchful eye on a unit program
- Maintain quarterly and simple detail assessments

Role of Roundtable Commissioner

- Take charge of the entire Roundtable program and gather an effective team to plan an annual schedule of monthly skills meetings. Serve as a teacher by sharing opportunities for growth in units and reinforcing practical skills.

Role of District Executive (not considered a commissioner)

- Serve as a local representative to the Boy Scouts National Organization and a member of the professional staff.

Commissioners are especially equipped for success in 2022 with access to the latest information through just a few taps on their smartphones, iPad or computers. Resources are

readily available to help ease or address any membership controversies. Commissioners can easily access resources from the national to the individual district level. Each district has several types of commissioners working together, known as “The District Commissioner Staff” (4).

The District Commissioners Staff

- **Administrative Commissioner**

Consist of the **District and Assistant District Commissioners**’

District Commissioner is selected by the council executive board to:

- Encourage and motivate the commissioner staff
- Recruit, educated, guide and reward unit commissioners
- Oversee assessments and monthly meetings for commissioners and roundtable.
- Serve as a member of the “Key 3” for the district
- Ensure that unit function is performed

The Assistant District Commissioner works with the District Commissioner and District Executive.

- **Unit Commissioner**

- Connect with assigned units
- Report on unit progress through assessment reports
- Attend monthly meeting

- Assist District Commissioner to maintain guidance and retention within the district
- Remain flexible and recommend changes to fit the district
- **Roundtable Commissioner**
 - Recruit a staff to provide monthly skillful meetings for all leaders and Scouting levels.
 - Focus on membership engagement with activities and learning sessions

Scouting is about shaping character and helping youth make the connections that will help them become stronger citizens within their communities. However, recent Scouting leadership scandals, the health pandemic and the resulting financial strain has critically affected Scouting operations. These disruptions have caused deep hurt, distrust, and concern among Scouts, their families, Scouting leaders and staff. The roadblocks to restoring trust and stability within our units have been a little difficult.

It is time to think outside the box with ways to increase commissioner's involvement towards unit success. Technology is shaping our current society with new ways to connect, and we need to know what is available; then explore ways to utilize this information.

The goal of this dissertation is to highlight ways to inform and refresh commissioners' knowledge of their responsibilities and the resources available to better serve and inspire their

assigned units. History has proven that by maintaining one mission, several levels of support and readily available resources, BSA Scouts can bounce back.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It is time for commissioners to review new information, resources, and tools available to aid in Scouting assessments, unit service plans, programs, and other operations. As Scouting procedures change, information must be updated; the methods for distributing that information must also evolve to include online resources.

One major change in Scouting procedure has been the inclusion of female Scouts. The first official announcement, in 2017, for females to become a member of the Boy Scouts was not without controversy (5). Females gradually became more involved in Scouting and worldly operation and by the year 2018, the Scouting program decided it was time for a name change; BSA dropped the Boy in Scouting to “BSA Scouts” (6). BSA also adjusted the standards so that females can earn Eagle status. To handle potential co-ed situation, commissioners’ and leaders’ training guides were updated. In 2018, the Boy Scout magazine was also renamed to *Scout Life*; it features both boy and girl Scouting issues (7).

New and updated resources are provided to help guide the leaders in preparing youth for life. The resources found at my.scouting.org include training tools for any position in Scouting (8). Commissioner can easily access the most up-to-date online manuals to find the answers they are seeking to address specific situations. The handbooks are revised to address the same training programs, but with an updated approach. The commissioner can locate monthly updates in the

Commissioner Tools Report, and with the help of social media sources, they can connect to information and to each other through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and YouTube (9).

Commissioners will need to do more than just read the literature; they must gain a full understanding of the issue at hand. Good communication is about listening and understanding. To do that, commissioners must sometimes reach out to other commissioners and/or Scouting leaders to ask for professional advice. By combining online, printed documents and personal connections, a commissioner is fully prepared to translate the necessary information to units to help them prepare for success.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

District Commissioners within BSA carry a lot of responsibility; giving service and leadership requires in-depth training and a sound knowledge of Scouting operations. Commissioners are introduced to many resources that they were not required to review as Scout leaders. Fulfilling their mission requires constant review of various resources, including commissioners' newsletters, newspapers, magazines, emails, online training and questionnaires. All commissioners must realize how important it is for even the most experienced Scout leader to get a firm grasp of the knowledge found in these resources before taking on the role of commissioner.

We know the importance of recruiting commissioners and understand that Scout leader training is not the same as commissioners training. So how are commissioners being trained to engage with units? Which method is being utilized the most? When faced with the latest news headlines, confusion and rumors, where do commissioners turn first to keep their units on track with the mission?

After speaking with several district commissioners, I noticed a need for commissioners to "share notes" on how they receive updated training and operational procedures, contact information for Scouting leaders and the latest newsletters.

The five questions compiled in the questionnaire include: What is your preference to use for commissioners training? Have the distractions over the last year caused a decrease in your

number of commissioners? If you answered no, briefly describe the ways your Scouting district maintained motivation and retention. What is your first line of resource for the latest updates? What is your district process for obtaining commissioners? (Appendix A).

Under the Piedmont Appalachian College of Commissioner Science (PACCS), there are eight councils and several districts. Fifteen commissioners across the National Service Territory (NST) were selected to share their opinions. Twelve commissioners responded giving suggestion regarding their District operations.

I considered mailing out the questionnaire but was concerned about the speed of receiving the responses through the US Postal Service. Electronic mail was the most efficient option. By creating the questionnaire through the Google Forms platform, I could simply email the questionnaire. Respondents were able to easily click on multiple choice responses for three of the questions and enter in brief answers for the two short answer questions. I distributed the Google Forms questionnaire through email on December 4, 2021. The respondents were given 10 days to complete the questionnaire. I followed up with an email or phone call reminder of the deadline of December 15, 2021.

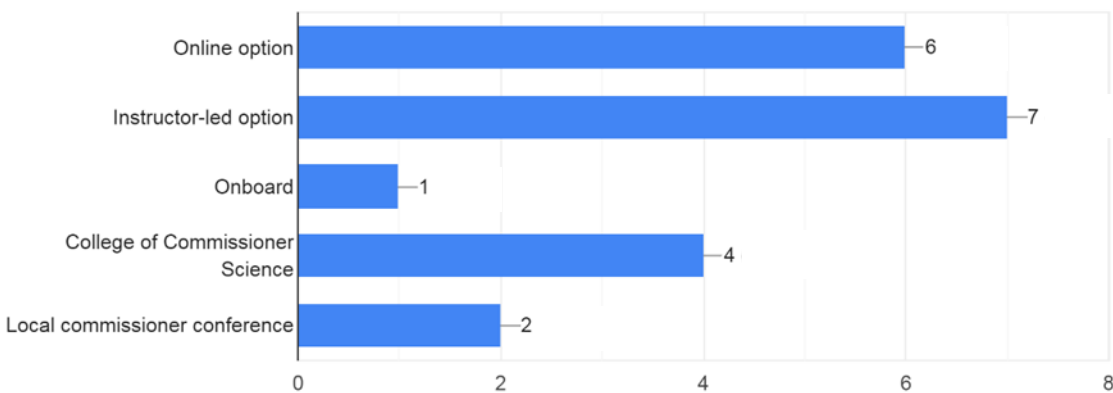
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The questions used in this survey are designed to help district commissioners gain a better understanding of how new resource information is being reviewed. The goal of this analysis is to determine the preferred method of gathering Scouting information. This project also aims at producing ideas for new commissioners seeking to conduct initial or recurring training. The Google Forms platform allowed for a clear and charted side-by-side analysis of all the responses. The results to each question are listed below.

Question 1: What is your preference to use for commissioner training?

Figure 1: Method of Training Preferred by Commissioners

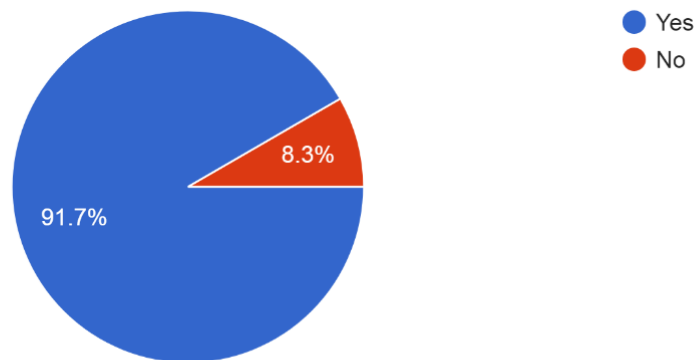


Each respondent was asked to select at least three training preferences. After reviewing the responses, it appears that the best way for training is still instructor-led, with seven votes.

The online option was selected by six of surveyed district commissioners, followed by four votes for the College of Commissioners Science, which is a full weekend training session.

Question 2: Have the distractions over the last year caused a decrease in your number of commissioners?

Figure 2: Did the Distractions Over the Last Year Affect the Number of Commissioners?



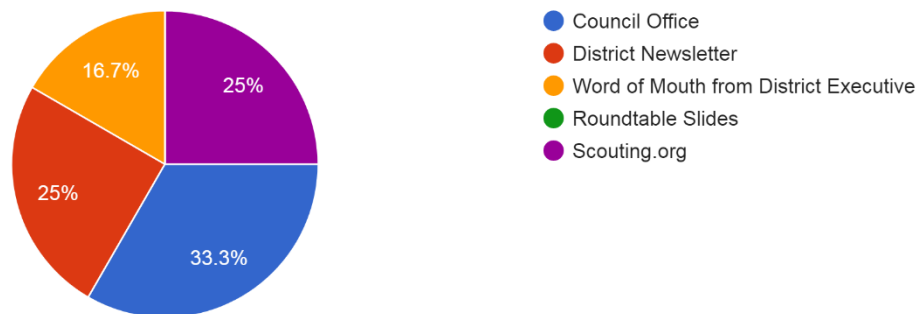
This question was selected when district commissioners noticed a decrease in unit reports over the last year. Clearly, the majority of commissioners agreed that distractions, which presumably included the COVID-19 pandemic, caused a decrease in the number of commissioners.

Question 3: If you answered no, briefly describe the ways your district-maintained motivation and retention.

This question specifically addressed districts that did not see disruptions during 2021. There was one response for this question. The respondent stated that many units have continued to meet. If an in-person meeting was not possible, commissioners were able to attend via video conference. The responding district also expressed appreciation for the flexible options of meeting in person or online.

Question 4: What is your first line of resource for the latest updates?

Figure 3: Commissioner Preferred Sources for Latest Updates.



Since all districts have same mission but operate differently, it's important to see what the preference is for resources. The responses are ranked as follows: Council Office, District Newsletter/Scouting.org (tied), and Word of Mouth from District Executive. The Roundtable Slides received zero responses. These results offer the District Commissioners additional data to potentially explore the effectiveness of the different information hubs.

Question 5: What is your district process for obtaining commissioners?

One suggestion noted from the responses was doing “individual recruitment one-on-one in a relaxed setting.” It is necessary to visit units, watch how leaders engaged with the youth, and determine how well the youth are accepting the adult leader. Through in-person observation, commissioners can identify leaders that are ready for a change. Another responded suggested that a district commissioner examines units that need a commissioner, identify experienced unit leaders and ask them if they would like to serve in this role. Then, the examining commissioner can follow up with any suggested referrals by the district Key 3.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

When the role of commissioners was established in the United States, it was created around the mission set by the Scouting founder Robert Baden-Powell. Commissioners are still working toward this mission by using their years of experiences, adequate training, knowledge of Scouting resources and several levels of support from the national level to the individual council and the professional staff. Commissioners are on the front line of communication from the council to their assigned responsibility.

As society and the world continue to evolve and change, the Scouting community is constantly updating ways to accommodate their resources for Scouts and Scouting leaders toward the goal of youth becoming responsible citizens. As a Scout leader, you lead the Scout; as a commissioner, you help develop the way to lead. Commissioners have an obligation to understand their position and stay up to date on all information from BSA, to successfully guide their units and engage potential Scouts and their families through community organizations, recreation centers, schools, and churches. Commissioners are guided by new resources from the national, regional, area, council and district.

This questionnaire and project opened a new line of communication, strengthening relationships between several districts and councils. It also provided a clearer picture of how districts and councils differ in their meeting, recruiting and information-gathering techniques. One of the potential outcomes that could be gained by this project is the opportunity for new

commissioners to have more insight into the most-utilized methods of gathering critical Scout information, fulfilling and retaining enough commissioners.

The results of this questionnaire aligned with my expected outcome that most commissioners rely on [scouting.org](https://www.scouting.org) for Scouting updates. Some of the latest updates discovered are newer resources, extended training suggestion and commissioner development. It is clear from the results that great suggestions often come from bringing awareness to things we sometimes overlook like as a unit commissioner asking to be in on a zoom meeting.

With so many disruptions and interruptions in our society, like the pandemic, commissioners must be ready to change a program at the last minute and stay flexible when it comes to meetings. Other ways to display good leadership include, providing an adequate agenda and promptly responding to meeting location issues by rescheduling to outdoor locations. Commissioners must keep meetings interesting and allow time to hear feedback and provide training. Maintaining strong relationships outside of regularly scheduled meetings is also an important tool; this can include one-on-one or small group informal zoom sessions, coffee or dinner meetings.

District Commissioners have a plan and a goal! Recruiting and retaining leaders with a servant heart is a big part of this plan. A new commissioner must be someone that will invest the time to commit to the vision and maintain the mission of the BSA. Once an experienced commissioner recruits a new commissioner, he or she must take time to get to know the recruit and slowly start the training with them side-by-side. Once the training is completed and the recruit has been assigned Scouting units, it is encouraging to acknowledge this achievement at an

award ceremony. Additional information on recruiting and gathering techniques can be found in the Additional Resources in Appendix B.

As commissioners navigate through this pandemic and look toward the future, we need to remain open-minded and identify new ways to energize and develop Scouts and Scout leaders. When charter organization doors close at one location, we need to reach out to secure new locations to maintain the growth of Scouting. Finding new organizations can be achieved through fraternal groups, businesses, and community to bring into the Scouting world as charter organization for a unit.

We live in a changing world, where face-to-face is not always an option however we can still provide effective training through virtual platforms. It just takes a little extra planning to allow for document presentation, feedback, and small group interactions. These virtual sessions can also be easily recorded and emailed out for attendees to review later to refresh their knowledge.

Lastly, since each district differs in its programming and methods of recruitment, it's important to remember that we are all working toward the same mission! Commissioners need to continue to communicate with each other across districts and councils, regularly share information, and stay knowledgeable of all BSA updates through the different resource channels. By engaging in these strategies, we will be able to effectively increase commissioner's engagement for unit's successfulness.

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5. <https://blog.scoutingmagazine.org/2021/01/05/boys-life-is-now-scout-life-new-name-same-great-magazine/>
6. <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/05/02/607678097/boy-scouts-changing-name-to-scouts-bsa-as-girls-welcomed-into-program>
7. blog.scoutingmagazine.org > 2021/01/05 > Bryan Wendell on Scouting magazine
8. my.scouting.org > training
9. filestore.scouting.org > marketing > pdf > Social media playbook Q4 release

APPENDIX A

COMMISSIONERS QUESTIONNAIRE WITH RESPONSES

Commissioner Questionnaire

Your participation in this short survey is needed as we evaluate ways of “Increasing Commissioner Engagement for Unit Success.” This questionnaire is part of a Commissioners College project.

1. What is your preference to use for commissioners training? (select at least 3)
 - a. Online option – 6 responses
 - b. Instructor-Led Option - 7 response
 - c. Onboard – 1 response
 - d. College of Commissioner Science – 4 responses
 - e. Local commissioner conference – 2 responses

2. Have the distractions over the last year caused a decrease in your number of commissioners?
 - a. Yes - 11 Responses
 - b. No – 1 Response

3. If you answered no, briefly describe the ways your Scouting district-maintained motivation and retention.

1 Response: Many units have continued to meet, if not in person, then online. I have encouraged Commissioners to attend these meetings. Commissioners are also able to attend the monthly Commissioner meetings in person or via video conference - the flexibility is appreciated.

4. What is your first line of resource for the latest updates?

a. Council Office – 4 Responses

b. District Newsletter – 3 Responses

c. Word of Mouth from District Executive – 2 Responses

d. Roundtable Slides – 0 Responses

e. Scouting.org – 3 Responses

5. What is your district process for obtaining commissioners?

- individual recruitment - one-on-one
- Research the leaders in all my Units and ask if they would like to be a commissioner. I have to be patient and give them the best information about performing the duties. I sit

with them and give them a notebook with some printouts of Unit Commissioner Handbook, any links to the information found on my.scouting.org to use to enter their Unit Visits and other items.

- Word of mouth and listening to someone who says they are interested
- As District Commiss., I've asked successful unit leaders if they would have one of their leaders become a commissioner. That hasn't worked at all. I'm going to ask directly to potential Commissioners.
- A potential commissioner is contacted and asked if they would like to be a commissioner, usually by the Scout office or another commissioner. If they are, they are advised to complete the basic commissioner training found on my.scouting.org. They are also asked to fill out an adult application for the position of commissioner.
- Recruiting through word of mouth.
- References from District Scouters
- District Commissioner / Key 3 review of qualified Scouters
- Identify leaders that want to take a step back from being a leader has been the practice
- Volunteers recruiting volunteers
- Prior unit leaders

Thank you for your participation.

Please return this completed survey by email no later than Wednesday, December 15, 2021

APPENDIX B
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Additional Resources

- Commissioner Manuals: Commissioner Training (scouting.org/commissioners/training/)
- Commissioner History, download the [History and Evolution of Commissioner insignia](#)
- History of Commissioners Service in Scouting by Randy Worcester - (commissioner-bsa.org)
- Looking into the Future – National Commissioner 1910 to 2010
- Los Angeles Times 2012 watchdog: Inside the Boy Scouts “Perversion Files”
- National Capital Area Council Boy Scout – (ncacbsa.org)
- The Commissioners Newsletter
- Council Newsletter
- BSA training – www.my.scouting.org
- Commissioner Development – www.scouting.org/commissioners
- Commissioners Newsletter – www.scouting.org/commissioners/newsletter
- BSA Roundtable Commissioners – www.scouting.org/commissioners/roundtable
- PACCS College of Commissioner – www.palmettocouncil.org/paccs
- # www.cnn.com>2019/02/02 Boys-scouts-girls-trending “Girls can now join Boy Scouts”
- # www.npr.org> sections > the two-way > 2018/05/02 Boy Scout changing Name to “Scouts BSA”
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- # filestore.scouting.org > mission > doc > BSA Social Media guidelines page 3 to 5