

**Narragansett Council
Boy Scouts of America**

**Council Service Delivery Structure Task Force
Background, Evaluation & Study Process**

Background

Over the past several years there has been a growing sense of frustration about the decline in Scouting participation. This is not a new problem. In a survey we conducted a few years ago, unit leaders identified that issue as their number one concern. Indeed for the past 40 years, since 1972, there has been a steady long term decline in participation, both locally and nationally.

Obviously there have been many changes in society that impact Scouting, such as competition from other youth organizations; competition from the internet, video games, etc; our relationships with and access to schools; time available to parents and others to be leaders; and an overall decline in “membership” organizations. All of this comes as no surprise; however, we have to ask ourselves what have we really done to adapt to these changes in society?

Nationally, the program has been updated from time to time with new advancement requirements and activities. Locally, we’ve done a good job of taking advantage of technology to communicate more effectively and are beginning to use social networking more and more. We’ve also realigned district boundaries and shifted resources to reflect the shifts in population.

But these changes have really been made at the margins. Our basic structure and business model have not changed in more than 50 years. It is a system that was created around the need to provide effective communication and support in the world of the 1950s. Today’s technologies provide an almost unlimited number of ways to efficiently maintain contact with our families and leaders and to disseminate information and resources directly to these people.

Furthermore, our families are no longer living the way their parents and grandparents did in the 1950s. Our current structure was built around the social conditions of that era, a time of “stay at home” moms and 40 hour work weeks. People had more time to volunteer, more time to take training, and more time to sit on committees – more time period!

The long term participation trends made us question the systems’ effectiveness. We had to ask ourselves – was our structure and business model still meeting the needs of youth and parents at the local unit level?

The Evaluation and Study Process

This was not a process that we entered into lightly. We were questioning a structure that dated back to the heydays of Scouting. Informal conversations began more than two years ago. These discussions increased and finally resulted in a formal meeting in early February that involved a group of about 30 people.

At that time the group agreed that the Council’s structure was no longer the best model to support Scouting in local communities.

It was agreed that we have not been doing things badly; it was just that what we have been doing does not seem to be what is needed to build and support strong units that retain youth and make the program grow in this day and age.

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Since that time various subcommittees and informal groups have been working to evaluate the current structure and draft a new organizational plan. A broad cross section has been involved in this process, including several council officers and board members with extensive experience in local units, some of our key council committee chairs, most of our current district chairmen, and several of our current district commissioners.

In looking at both current and prospective youth members, it was noted that families join “Scouting” – they don’t join the “Narragansett Council” or a “District”. Indeed, many of Scouting’s acronyms and the names we use for activities and events are alien to a new parent. Further, when a family joins Scouting they expect – and have a right to expect – to receive essentially the same quality and level of programming in a unit in their local community regardless of where they live. Unit activities may be different – choice is certainly a good thing – but there must be a consistency in program quality and the level of activity.

The study determined that we seemed to be spending a lot of time in committee meetings and in performing other tasks that really do not directly impact the quality of the weekly program or monthly outdoor program at the unit level. Furthermore, many of the activities and events we offer have not attracted sufficient participation to justify the time and resources volunteers and staff have had to commit to them.

Finally, it was agreed that the units that deliver the program in local communities should receive the same high level of support from the Council –regardless of where they are located. Currently, program and service is delivered through seven “district organizations”, which makes it hard to be consistent. The study concluded that our geography doesn’t support that many “sub-organizations”, each of which consumes volunteer time and other resources.

A preliminary report was shared with the Council’s Executive Board on May 20th at which time the board voted to move forward in the planning process. On Saturday, June 19th two orientation sessions were held for district committee members and commissioners. Using the feedback received from those meetings the planning process continued and a final proposal was approved by the Executive Board on July 22nd.