



# BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA®

## TROOP 44

# HOW A SCOUT TROOP WORKS

By Hal Daume

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A Boy Scout Troop is a microcosm of democracy-in-action. Its key leaders are elected by their peers, and then provide direction through the Troop's essential operating units: Its PATROLS.

*The Patrol Method is not "a way of running a Scout troop; it is the ONLY way of running a Scout Troop. Without The Patrol Method, there is no Scouting.*

- Lord Robert S.S. Baden-Powell of Gilwell

With the Scoutmaster's guidance, Scouts form themselves into Patrols, plan the Troop's annual, monthly, and individual meeting programs, and bring these to life. For this to happen, the Troop relies on Scouts serving in key positions of responsibility, make up the PATROL LEADERS COUNCIL (aka "PLC") – The PLC is the primary operational/program decision-making body of the Troop.

## THE SCOUTMASTER

Appointed by the executive officer of the Troop's Chartered Organization (or designate, the Chartered Organization Representative) with the agreement of the troop Committee Chair, the Scoutmaster is responsible—in this order—for: (1) training and guiding all youth leaders in the operation of their patrols and their troop, and (2) managing, training, and supporting the troop's Assistant Scoutmasters in their roles.

## THE PATROLS & THE PATROL METHOD

The Patrol is the fundamental unit of the Boy Scout program; the troop is the "umbrella" under which the Patrols operate.

A Patrol is a grouping of approximately six to never more than eight Scouts who work together. Each Patrol elects its own Patrol Leader, who then chooses his assistant (APL). Within the larger community of the troop, the Patrol is a Scout's family circle. The patrol helps its members develop a sense of pride and identity, and encourages increasing level of responsibility.

*The object of The Patrol Method is to give responsibility to the Scout.*

- Lord Robert S.S. Baden-Powell of Gilwell

*Never do for a boy what he can do for himself*

- The Scoutmaster's Handbook.

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## THE TROOP'S KEY YOUTH LEADERS

The Troop is run by its key youth leaders. With the guidance of the Scoutmaster, these youth leaders plan the program, conduct troop meetings, and provide leadership among their peers. In addition to the Patrol Leaders who comprise the Patrol Leaders Council (PLC), the two most senior youth leaders are:

- The Senior Patrol Leader (SPL) is the Troop's top youth leader. He leads troop meetings and the Patrol Leaders Council and, in consultation with the Scoutmaster, appoints other youth leaders and assigns specific responsibilities as needed. The Senior Patrol leader is elected by all Scouts in the troop, usually for a six-month term.
- The Assistant Senior Patrol Leader (ASPL) is selected by the SPL to assist him (the Scoutmaster provides advice regarding this selection, but is not the decision-maker). The ASPL fills in for the SPL in his absence and is also responsible for training and giving direction to the troop's Quartermaster, Scribe, Order of the Arrow Troop Representative, Troop Historian, Troop Librarian, and Instructors (if any).
- Troop Guide(s) (if any, and only when providing guidance for the Patrol Leader of a new Scout patrol).

## THE PATROL LEADERS' COUNCIL

The Patrol Leaders Council (PLC), not the adult leaders or Troop Committee, is responsible for planning and conducting all troop activities. The PLC is composed of these key decision-makers: SPL and ASPL, and all Patrol Leaders (the Troop Scribe may be requested to attend the PLC to take notes, but he is not a voting member; neither is the Scoutmaster; ASMs do not attend PLC meetings). At the PLC's monthly meetings, these key youth leaders plan, organize and assign activity responsibilities for the weekly troop meetings for the coming month. The PLC also plans the troop's annual calendar of activities.

The Scoutmaster guides and mentors but does not lead or control PLC meetings and program-planning, and then informs the troop Committee of the PLC's plans and decisions. The Troop Committee may offer suggestions to the PLC through the Scoutmaster, but neither the Scoutmaster nor the Committee votes on, approves, vetoes, or otherwise disapproves what the PLC has decided, except in the event of a potential safety or youth protection violation.

### Model Patrol Leaders' Council Monthly Meeting Agenda

<u>Activity</u>	<u>By</u>
Opening and Call to Order	Senior Patrol Leader
Roll Call and Reading of the Log	Troop Scribe
Patrol Reports	Patrol Leaders
Old Business	Senior Patrol Leader
Big Event Planning	Senior Patrol Leader
Troop Meeting Planning	Senior Patrol Leader
New Business	Senior Patrol Leader
Scoutmaster's Minute	Scoutmaster

### Follow-Up & Follow-Through Make It Happen

On conclusion of each PLC meeting, the Troop's youth leaders should understand the plan for Troop whatever is coming up... meeting, campout, service project, or special event. They also will understand precisely who is responsible for what, by when, and to whom they'll report their progress. If any of the responsibilities fall outside the PLC (for instance, the Troop Committee, etc.) the Scoutmaster takes charge of these. Ultimately, everyone reports in to the SPL, while the Scoutmaster acts as his backup/guide/mentor. Regular communication among all Patrol Leaders and their SPL is maintained via phone and/or email/IM/TM, and in-person at troop meetings. The SPL and the Scoutmaster always confer briefly before

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Troop meetings and activities to look over the agenda and responsibilities developed and agreed upon by the Patrol Leaders Council and to make sure that everything is ready to go according to plan.

### The Annual Program Planning Conference

This is the single most important meeting that the PLC will have in the course of the troop's Scouting Year. Here, the PLC selects and plans the Troop's activities for the coming Scouting Year. This conference is organized and led by the Senior Patrol Leader. The Scoutmaster backs up but never, ever supplants the SPL. The annual calendar that the PLC develops takes into account the desires and interests of the Troop's members plus District, Council, and National Scouting events. On completion, through the Scoutmaster, the calendar is delivered to the Troop Committee for support (see above).

## TROOP COMMITTEE

The Troop Committee supports the Troop program by

- making sure that high quality adult leadership is identified, recruited and trained;
- providing, with the troop's Chartered Organization, an appropriate, adequate, and safe meeting place;
- advising the Scoutmaster on policies of the BSA and the Chartered Organization, as necessary;
- taking responsibility for finances, adequate funds, and disbursements in line with a formal budget plan;
- obtaining and maintaining troop property;
- assuring that the troop has an outdoor program, including Scout summer camp, and supporting it with adequate leadership (two-deep, minimum), transportation, etc.;
- maintaining Scout advancement records and serving on rank advancement Boards of Review\*;
- encouraging regular Courts of Honor;
- supporting the Scoutmaster in working with boys individually and problems that may affect the overall troop program;
- helping the Troop to carry out the annual Friends of Scouting fund-raising campaign,
- Keeping the adult volunteer positions needed to support the Troop filled.

For essential utility, the Troop Committee needs to provide the troop with these positions: Chair, Membership, Advancement, Finance, and Outdoor Support.

\* Only registered members of the Troop Committee may sit on boards of review for the ranks of Tenderfoot through Life, plus Eagle palms. (Eagle rank boards of review have special, unique membership stipulations.)

## WEEKLY TROOP MEETINGS

The weekly Troop meeting is the glue that holds a Boy Scout Troop together. These meetings, planned and run by the troop's youth leaders, can be full of excitement, learning-by-doing, and satisfaction. Meeting time devoted to learning new skills and organizing future campouts, service projects, and other activities help keep interest levels and enthusiasm high. They serve many purposes:

- **Motivating Scouts.** From Scouts' points of view, troop meetings are chances for them to get together with their Patrol friends for fun and adventure. For the Scoutmaster, meetings offer opportunities for Scouts to learn, advance, learn new leadership skills, and improve themselves.
- **Strengthening Patrols.** Patrols have opportunities at troop meetings to meet together, to learn as a team, and to share what they know. Whether they serve as the honor guard for the meeting's opening ceremony, or as presenters of a Scouting skill, or as the organizers of the weekly inter-patrol game or activity, every patrol can contribute to every troop meeting.

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- **Learning & Practicing Scouting Skills.** A portion of every Troop meeting is focused on the demonstration and practice of skills that will enhance Scouts' ability to hike and camp, and to meet advancement requirements.
- **Exercising Leadership.** Every week, the Troop's youth leaders take charge of planning, carrying out, and then assessing the success of their troop meetings. Leadership can be learned only by experience, and troop meetings are the venue for this to happen.
- **Promoting Scout spirit.** Troop meetings offer ideal settings for Patrols to take part in contests and competitions that test their expertise and their abilities to cooperate with one another. And meetings always end with the Scoutmaster's Minute.

### Weekly Troop Meetings – The Committee's Perspective

The committee uses Troop meetings to further its own purposes and goals, including conducting boards of review for Scouts who have completed rank requirements for advancement, and reaching out to new Troop parents, getting to know them, and inviting them to attend committee meetings – This is essential to maintaining the vitality of the Troop.

### Weekly Troop Meetings – The Scoutmaster's Perspective

In Troop meetings, the Scoutmaster can observe the youth leaders in action so that, in separate conferences with them, they can be coached on how to improve and refine their leadership skills. Troop meetings are also a time and place for conferencing with Scouts who are advancing, and those who aren't. Finally, each week the Scoutmaster has the opportunity to "teach a new lesson" in Scout Spirit via the Scoutmaster's Minute.

## Planning a Troop Meeting

Responsibility for the conduct and content of a Troop meeting falls to the Scouts themselves. Troop meetings are planned well in advance by the Senior Patrol Leader and the PLC.

Each Troop meeting will have been planned the previous month at the meeting of the PLC. The Senior Patrol Leader will have assigned Patrols and individuals to take care of portions of a meeting, giving as many Scouts as possible the chance to contribute. The seven-part Troop meeting plan provides the framework for efficient, well-run troop meetings.

### The Seven Parts of a Troop Meeting

1. Pre-opening
2. Opening
3. Skills Instruction
4. Patrol Meetings
5. Inter-patrol Activity
6. Closing–Scoutmaster's Minute
7. After the Meeting

## Using the Troop Meeting Plan

The seven-part plan for Troop meetings is an important guide, but use it flexibly. While the seven parts of the meeting are to be followed, the times noted in the plan are suggestions only and can vary to fit various situations. For example, the Troop may be getting ready for a camp-out. The usual amount of time set aside for Patrol meetings might be expanded to allow Scouts time to complete their patrol camping preparations. Or, a troop nearing the date of a District Camporee may devote extra time to skills instruction so that everyone will be ready for activities involving the theme of the camporee, and the inter-patrol activity can include an extended competition that also focuses on the key skills.

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When the minutes allotted to one part of the Troop meeting plan increase, consider shortening other portions of the plan. Every Troop meeting should be interesting and useful, and begin and end on time.

### THE PRE-OPENING

As Scouts begin to arrive for a Troop meeting, a Patrol Leader or an older Scout assigned by the SPL gets them involved in a pre-opening game or project designed so that additional Scouts can join in as they show up. The pre-opening is often well-suited for the outdoors. Those in charge of the pre-opening activity should be ready to start about 15 minutes before the scheduled beginning of the meeting. Varying activities from week to week will keep the pre-opening fresh.

Scouts whose Patrol has been assigned to serve that week as the service Patrol should use the pre-opening time to prepare for the troop meeting. The meeting room may need to be rearranged, chairs set up, flags displayed, and other preparations completed before the meeting can begin.

### THE OPENING (5 MINUTES)

Call the meeting to order on time, the SPL instructs his PLs to line up their patrols in formation. Then, the Patrol responsible for the opening ceremony may conduct a flag ceremony and then lead the Troop members in the Scout Oath and Law, Motto, patrol attendance (with Patrol yells!), etc.

### SKILLS INSTRUCTION (15 TO 20 MINUTES)

This portion of the meeting is devoted to the mastery of knowledge that Scouts need to participate fully in an upcoming activity, or upon skills they must learn to complete advancement requirements. The skills to be taught at each meeting will have been determined in advance by the Patrol leaders' council. Often the skills will relate directly to the month's program plan for troop activities. Instruction should be hands-on learning rather than lecturing. Those who may be effective in teaching skills are the troop guide, instructors, youth assistant Scoutmasters, assistant Scoutmasters, and members of the troop committee. Older Scouts and members of the Venture Patrol also can be effective instructors, though at most meetings they will be involved in their own activities. Whenever possible, troop skills instruction should be divided into three levels:

8. Basic Scouting skills instruction for the new Scouts
9. Advanced instruction for the experienced Scouts
10. Expert instruction for the Venture Patrol

Each instructional area should be separated from the others so that distractions are minimized.

### PATROL MEETINGS (5 TO 20 MINUTES)

At the end of the skills instruction, the SPL asks the PLs to take their patrols to their areas for their patrol meetings. Matters to be dealt with during this time include taking attendance, (sometimes) collecting dues, planning the Patrol's involvement in upcoming troop activities, selecting menus for hikes and campouts, assigning patrol members to specific tasks, and working out any other details for the smooth operation of the patrol. The SPL circulates amongst the patrol meetings, ready to serve as a resource if a PL asks for assistance. Once the patrols have completed their work, the SPL has the PLs bring their patrols back together, and they move on to the next part of the troop meeting.

### INTER-PATROL ACTIVITY (15 TO 20 MINUTES)

The SPL (or someone he appoints) leads this opportunity for the patrols and their members to interact with one another in a competitive or a cooperative effort. The activity might be a game that will test the skills the Scouts are learning for an upcoming activity—pitching tents or tying knots, for example. The BSA books, Troop Program Resources have a wealth of games to foster friendly teamwork and competition. The BSA manual, Project COPE (No. 34371), also contains many appropriate games and challenges.

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### CLOSING -SCOUTMASTER'S MINUTE (5 MINUTES)

The closing of a meeting is the Scoutmaster's opportunity to step forward—this is actually the only time he appears before the entire troop in a regular troop meeting! The SPL asks his PLs to sit their patrols quietly, then he turns the meeting over to the Scoutmaster for (brief!) reminders and announcements about upcoming events, and support of the patrols for their achievements and progress.

The highlight of the closing will be the "Scoutmaster's Minute"—a brief message built on one of Scouting's values. As the concluding thought of a troop meeting, the Scoutmaster's Minute is a message each Scout can carry home.

### THE "AFTER THE MEETING" MEETING (5 MINUTES)

Here, the PLCs' stays a few moments after the closing to discuss with their SPL and Scoutmaster the quality of the just-concluded meeting. The SPL offers praise for portions of the meeting that went well, and talks about ways that future troop meetings can be improved. The Scoutmaster offers commentary only when called upon by the SPL.

Here are some questions to ask about the meeting:

- Was the meeting fun?
- What should we not do again?
- Did we accomplish a purpose?
- Did we do something new and different?
- Did we have all the resources necessary to accomplish tasks?
- What worked well that we should do again?

Finally, the PLC reviews the Troop Meeting Plan for the next meeting and makes sure that everyone who will have a role is aware of the assignment and is prepared to do a good job. While the PLC is reviewing the meeting, the Service Patrol is putting away Troop gear and returning the meeting room to order.

### Youth Leader Tips for Running a Good Troop Meeting

- Prior to the meeting, review the Troop meeting plan with the Scoutmaster.
- Keep the meeting moving. If the proceedings of one part of the meeting seem to have run out of energy, move on to the next.
- Start the meeting on time.
- Take charge of the meeting. Scouts will follow your lead.
- Stay focused on the program feature of the month.
- When you are ready to move from one part of the meeting to the next, use the Scout sign to gain the attention of all troop members.
- Praise Patrols when they have done something well.
- Set a good example by wearing your BSA uniform to Troop meetings.
- When Patrol members are watching, be supportive and positive in your comments to Patrol leaders, if you feel the need for constructive criticism, speak with Patrol leaders in private.
- End every meeting on time.
- Review each meeting to see what can be improved in the future.
- Don't wear out favorite pre-opening or inter-patrol games and activities. Try new challenges.

### Adult Leader Tips for Effective troop Meetings

- Troop meetings must have variety, action, and purpose.

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- Variety. Don't get in the same old rut. Help the senior Patrol leader mix in surprises now and then—a special visitor, for example, a fresh activity, or perhaps a chance for the Troop to make homemade ice cream. Keep a file of resources and ideas that can add spice to meetings.
- Action. Boys spend much of their day sitting in school. Get them out of their chairs at troop meetings. Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class Scouts should be involved in learning basic Scout skills. Keep in mind that all Scouts, regardless of their age or experience level, should be active participants, not just observers.
- Purpose. Troop meetings should be built around a purpose; for example, helping Scouts prepare for an upcoming activity or event.
- Many meetings can and should take place outdoors.
- The Patrol that was assigned the previous week to be this week's service Patrol should arrive early enough to prepare the room or outdoor area for the troop meeting. At the end of the meeting it is the service Patrol's responsibility to put everything away and return the meeting space to its original condition.
- The SPL is in charge of every Troop meeting. Help him plan ahead, coach him along the way, but stay in the background and let him be the leader.
- Encourage the SPL to start and end meetings on time—90 minutes is the ideal.
- You and the youth leaders can use the Scout sign any time the Troop must come to order, especially when shifting from one part of a meeting to another. Keep it effective by using it sparingly.
- Don't wear out activities the Scouts enjoy. If the Troop has a favorite game, keep things lively by alternating it with other games now and then rather than relying on the same one every week.
- During the planning stages of skills instruction, remind instructors that demonstrations are most persuasive when they show rather than simply tell. If a troop instructor is going to explain how to load and carry a backpack, he should bring the gear and the pack to the meeting.
- Hands-on. Experience is an especially effective method of teaching. Coach instructors on the importance of involving Scouts as participants in skills instruction, not simply observers. Plan ahead. Will a Patrol need a plant identification book for nature study? Will each Scout need a length of rope to learn a new knot? Instructors should get in the habit of gathering their materials ahead of time.
- Coach youth leaders to keep meetings moving at a fast pace. If an activity or project is not working well, suggest that the boy leaders end it and move on to the next item of the meeting plan.
- Keep the length of the Scoutmaster's Minute to not much more than just that—a minute. Just as you ask youth leaders to plan well for efficient meetings, give some thought ahead of time to how you'll manage the meeting's close.
- End the meeting on time. Leave the boys wanting more and they will be eager to return the next week.
- Unless they're been invited to take part in a specific part of a meeting, visitors should be observers only. Don't allow them to disrupt the flow of events.
- The recognition and encouragement Scouts receive from their Scoutmaster is a crucial part of their development. At every meeting find something positive to praise about each Patrol—well planned presentations, proper uniforming, a good opening ceremony, or even something as simple as arriving on time.
- Support youth leaders in a positive manner during meetings. If you feel the need to correct or criticize, save your thoughts until after the meeting and then find a productive way of teaching boy leaders how to be more effective.

## ANNUAL PROGRAM PLANNING CONFERENCE of the PLC

This Annual Program Planning Conference is a 5-step process:

1. Doing your homework
2. Getting Patrol input
3. Holding the planning conference
4. Communicating with the Troop Committee
5. Announcing the plan to the Troop.

### **Step 1: Homework (Done jointly by the SPL & Scoutmaster in advance)**

- Evaluate the past year (What to keep, to drop, to do a different way)
- Review the troop Program Planning video (No. AV-02VOI0)
- Get District and Council event dates (Camporee, Klondike, etc.)
- Get National event dates (Scouting for Food, SCOUT WEEK, etc.)
- Get dates of community events; key school events, activities, and holidays; and the Chartered Organization's special event dates
- Check the advancement status of the Scouts, to decide on the types of activities are needed to help each Scout progress
- Prioritize the activities most important for the troop to continue (e.g., summer camp, Philmont trek, monthly outings, annual sponsor service project, fundraising event(s), Good Turn for the community, earning the National Camping Award, National Quality Unit Award, etc.)
- Draw up a preliminary outline of the annual troop program (keep it as flexible as possible while still fulfilling the accomplishments envisioned for the troop)
- Review the agenda Program Planning Conference agenda and components

### **Step 2: Getting Patrol Input**

At a monthly PLC meeting, present the list of priorities you and the Scoutmaster have developed and explore the range of options you believe are available to the troop. For example, you might feel that the needs of the troop can be best achieved by adopting any of 36 selected program features available from the BSA publications troop Program Features, Volumes 1, 11, and III, Nos. 33110, 33111, and 33112.

Paring down those possibilities to a dozen-one for each month-will be easier to do after Patrol leaders have shared the list with Patrol members and gotten their thoughts on the features that most interest them. Remind Patrol leaders to bring their Patrols' recommendations to the program planning conference.

### **Step 3: Hold the Troop Program Planning Conference**

The Troop's planning conference is an opportunity for members of the PLC to map out the Troop's activities for the year and for the Troop's adult leaders to offer guidance and support. In consultation with the Scoutmaster, set a time and a place for the conference and invite the following persons to attend:

#### **In an Active Role:**

- Senior Patrol leader
- Assistant senior Patrol leader
- All Patrol leaders
- Troop guide

#### **In a Supportive role:**

- Scoutmaster
- Assistant Scoutmasters
- Youth assistant Scoutmasters

The Scribe may be invited to the conference to keep log of the proceedings; but he isn't a voting member of the conference.

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Open the conference with a team-building, activity or an action game that will promote cooperation among the participants.

Showing part two of the video troop Program Planning can set the stage for the conference as it reminds those in attendance of the importance of the work they are about to do.

### ANNUAL TROOP PROGRAM PLANNING CONFERENCE AGENDA

The intent of the annual troop program planning conference is four-fold:

- Develop troop goals for the coming year.
- Select the major events for the coming year.
- Select the program features for the coming year.
- Fill out the troop's calendar for the coming year.

#### *Develop Troop Goals*

The Scoutmaster leads a discussion that guides the group in developing a list of the goals they want to see the Troop achieve in the next 12 months. The Scoutmaster may present a list of goals and then encourage the group to expand upon them or adjust the list to better fit the needs of troop members. By majority vote the PLC approves the troop goals.

#### *Select the Major Events*

With the Scoutmaster's assistance, you as senior Patrol Leader review potential major events for the troop—summer camp, Scout shows, etc. These events may be entered on a calendar and photocopied for everyone's information. Invite Patrol leaders to share input resulting from the Patrols' discussions of the proposed major events for the troop. Be sure to consider the preparation time required for each event and how that will affect the troop's calendar. Open the floor for discussion of any or all of the proposed events. Encourage input from every conference participant. Decide by a majority vote whether to include each major event on the Troop's annual calendar. Enter the elected items on the Troop Planning Worksheet, from Troop Program Features.

#### *Select the Program Features*

With the Scoutmaster's support, the SPL presents the list of potential monthly program features, and opens the floor to discuss each of these. Consider these points:

- Will the program feature help the Troop meet its goals?
- What opportunities for advancement does it present?
- Where would the feature best fit into the annual calendar?

#### *Fill out the Troop's Calendar*

Using the Troop Planning Work Sheet, develop the troop's calendar by writing the following items in their appropriate spots:

- Monthly program features
- Boards of review
- Courts of honor
- Recruitment nights
- Webelos Scout graduation
- Any other Troop activities that can be scheduled this far in advance
- Service project for the chartered organization
- Lead the group in a review of the Troop Planning Work Sheet. Once the group has approved the final edition of the plan, it will be ready to present to the Troop Committee for its input and approval.

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- Plan the Troop program for the upcoming month, beginning by showing part three of the Troop Program Planning video.
- Close the Troop's annual program planning conference by inviting the Scoutmaster to offer a Scoutmaster's Minute.

### Step 4: Consult With the troop Committee and Chartered Organization

The SPL and the Scoutmaster (notice who's listed first?) present the plan to the Troop committee and the Chartered Organization Representative and ask for their support. If revisions are suggested, the SPL will take the plan back to the PLC for further consideration and PLC final approval.

### Step 5: Announce the Plan

Distribute copies of the final plan to troop members, parents and guardians of Scouts, members of the troop committee, and representatives of the chartered organization. Copies of the plan also should be given to the Cub Scout pack leaders, unit commissioners, the district executive, the head and secretary of the chartered organization, and the building custodian.

## THE MONTHLY PATROL LEADERS' COUNCIL MEETING

The PLC runs the Troop according to the policies of the Boy Scouts of America, utilizing the guidance and counsel of the Scoutmaster.

The PLC plans the Troop program at the annual program planning conference. It then meets every four weeks to fine-tune the plans for the coming month.

At the conclusion of Troop meetings (and at other times the SPL feels the PLC should consider an issue) the PLC meets informally (a "stand-up meeting") to review the success of a troop activity and to go over responsibilities for future meetings and events.

The Scoutmaster is present at PLC meetings, in a supportive role to provide information and insight on issues and activities. To the greatest extent possible, it is the members of the PLC who plan and carry out the program of a boy-run, Scout-led troop.

*The Scoutmaster serves the troop; it's not the other way around.*

- Andy McCommish