



Commissioner Newsletter

Your Single, Best Resource.

December 22, 2025 Edition

"Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality." - Warren Bennis

MLK Day of Service, January 19

January 19 will be an important moment for Scouts across the country as they participate in the Martin Luther King Jr. National Day of Service. This day invites every American to step forward and strengthen their communities through meaningful volunteer work, and Scouts will be ready to lead by example.

Across Scouting America, units are planning service projects that reflect the values Dr. King championed. Scouts will take part in community cleanups, support local shelters and food programs, assist service organizations, and look for thoughtful ways to lift up neighbors who need a hand. It will be a "Day On, Not a Day Off," and a chance for young people to show what service in action looks like.

Dr. King's connection to Scouting began in his youth when he was a member of Troop 151 in Atlanta. His time in Scouting helped nurture a spirit of leadership and community responsibility that would later define his work for justice and equality.

As we look ahead to MLK Day 2026, we encourage every unit to plan a project that reflects the heart of Dr. King's legacy. By serving with purpose, Scouts will honor his message and continue the work of building stronger and more caring communities.

The MLK Day of Service emblem is available [here](#) or in local Scouting America retail outlets.

Scouting Is For All

The Winter 2026 Abilities Digest is now available online [here](#). The issue highlights awareness events such as Jamboree 2026 and summer programs at Philmont, explores why language matters, and shares how to recognize excellence through the Woods Service Award and Torch of Gold. Also provided is clearer guidance on advancement for Venturers and Sea Scouts, along with useful resources like Scoutly.

Scouts BSA Advancement Updates

Changes to some Scouts BSA merit badge requirements will take effect on January 1. These updates will help Scouts explore modern career paths and hobbies, develop practical skills, and

engage with current topics while maintaining the quality and tradition of the Scouting advancement program. These changes are tentative; additional changes may occur before January 1. See the changes [here](#).

New Unified Scouts BSA Handbook

Based on valuable feedback from youth and volunteers, a single Scouts BSA Handbook has been created for all youth in the Scouts BSA program. This handbook does not replace the current 14th Edition of the Scouts BSA Handbook, and it does not include any major program changes. It is simply a unified version of the handbook that can be used by both boys and girls in Scouts BSA. The content remains the same, but the photos now represent all youth in Scouts BSA. Leaders, youth, and units expressed their desire for this unified version, and we listened.

The handbook will be available for purchase at Scout Shops nationwide in January 2026 (or sooner if the current supply runs short), and online at scoutshop.org.

Social Media Is Where We Break News First

Follow the [Commissioners of Scout America's Facebook page](#) and [Instagram account](#) and help spread the word about Scouting by liking and sharing posts. Engage those whom you serve by being where they go for information.

We Have Your Back

The National Commissioner Service Team (NCST) exists to serve commissioners. Learn who the members of the 2025-26 team are and what they do [here](#). Reach out to us. How can we help you?

Ask A Commissioner

Q. Traditionally, none of my units have recruited Scouts to their packs in January. How can I encourage them to take advantage of the start of a new year?

A. I love your thinking. Most packs see the beginning of the Scout year as the only “recruiting season.” With the recent changes to the Cub Scout advancement process, unit leaders are better able to recruit new members year-round. Here are a few ideas:

Host a New Year open house - Plan a fun, low-pressure event in January that highlights hands-on activities like knot tying, simple games, or outdoor skills. Keep it short, energetic, and welcoming for both youth and parents.

Tie recruitment to fresh start themes - Promote scouting as a way to start the year with new skills, confidence, leadership, and friendships. This message fits naturally with common New Year goals.

Leverage schools and community calendars - Coordinate with schools, PTOs, libraries, and community centers that often welcome new programs at the start of the year. Ask to distribute flyers, attend family nights, or host interest tables.

Activate current families as ambassadors - Encourage current scouts and parents to personally invite friends, classmates, and neighbors. Personal invitations are often the most effective recruiting tool, as is the offer of free bacon.

Highlight upcoming adventures - Publicize exciting events that are happening soon, such as campouts, hikes, service projects, or summer camp signups. Families are more likely to join when they see immediate value. A long-range calendar helps sell the value proposition.

Simplify the joining process - Make it easy by having leaders ready to explain registration, costs, uniforms, and schedules clearly. Provide printed or digital checklists so families can act quickly.

Use social media and local groups - Share photos, short videos, and event reminders in local community groups, neighborhood pages, and school-related forums. Focus on fun, safety, and inclusiveness. Make sure what you share reflects the diversity of the community that you wish to serve.

Partner with service projects - Start the year with a visible community service project and invite prospective families to participate. Serving together builds connection and shows scouting values in action. Consider an MLK Day of Service event – information is above.

Train leaders to greet and follow up – Be prepared! Assign specific leaders to welcome new families, answer questions, and follow up within a week. Prompt, friendly follow-up greatly improves retention.

Celebrate new members publicly - Recognize new scouts at meetings or ceremonies early on. Feeling noticed and appreciated helps families commit long-term. Make retention in the first 30 days a big focus.

You have questions? Commissioners have answers!

Reach out by email: commissionersserviceteam@scouting.org



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