

BCS 101

Core Concepts of Unit Service



Time allotted	50 minutes
Teaching format	Instructor-led discussion with PowerPoint support, Activity

Resources

Handouts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BCS 101 - Commissioner's Core Concepts – 1 per person • BCS 101 -Why Do a Unit Service Plan – 1 per person
Equipment and materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BCS 101 - Core Concepts of Unit Service course plan • BCS 101 - Core Concepts of Unit Service PowerPoint presentation • Set of BCS 101 Activity Cards (slide 16) • Computer and projector • Whiteboard or flipchart, appropriate markers and eraser
Resources for additional participant learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unit Roadmap – Starting, Sustaining & Growing Units 2020

Course Connections

Connections to other CCS courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • none
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Presentation Outline

Introduction and Course Objectives – 5 minutes

The position of commissioner is one of the oldest in Scouting. This course reviews and reinforces the core concepts of unit service and identifies the key skills needed for commissioners to be able to assess the units they serve.

Introduce the learning objectives, noting that by the end of this session, each participant should...

- **Describe** the commissioner's core concepts.
- **Define** and identify the role and types of commissioners.

- **State** the key skills needed to be a good commissioner
- **Apply** this new knowledge and understanding for exceptional unit service

Commissioner Core Concepts – 15 minutes

Note – before beginning Slide 3 distribute: History of Commissioner Service – 1 per person

History

In the early days of the BSA, units were organized by resourceful individuals who sometimes had to acquire materials from England and other places to make Scouting happen. These first organizers were commissioners.

In 1916 some of these commissioners were asked to become scout executives. A few accepted the position and the field executive position was born. This shift eventually led to the separation of the roles of the executive and the commissioner. This began a partnership between volunteers and professionals that exists still today.

The position of commissioner is one of the oldest in Scouting and is the origin of the professional Scouting positions, which is why professional Scouters wear the Wreath of Service as well. As councils grew, more help was needed. The councils began to divide the workload into manageable districts where the district commissioner structure emerged.

In the 1940's a need for unit serving commissioners was apparent. The workload on district commissioners and deputy district commissioners was too heavy, and a more personal touch was needed. The position of neighborhood commissioner was created to fill this gap. These neighborhood commissioners would usually serve only up to four units.

By the 1960's the terminology changed as did the structure. Neighborhood commissioners were now known as unit commissioners and only served a maximum of three units. All deputy positions were changed to assistant. Commissioner unit service as we know it today began to take shape.

Positions today include national commissioner; each council has a council commissioner and assistant council commissioners. At the district level you will find most of BSA's commissioners serving, whether as district commissioner, assistant district commissioners, roundtable commissioners, or unit commissioners. The unit commissioner being the most important of all the rest because of the unit service they provide. Without that service, we would have no reason to have the other positions.

Note – before beginning Slide 4 distribute: Commissioner's Core Concepts – 1 per person

Commissioner's Mission

As commissioners, we share the BSA's mission:

To prepare youth to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law.

Commissioner's Vision

Every member of the BSA has a great Scouting experience.

Commissioner Objectives

Commissioners need to focus on five objectives as displayed here on the screen:

- **Support unit growth and retention in Journey to Excellence.**
JTE measures performance characteristics that unlock the door to a successful unit. We should analyze the unit's program and identify JTE areas where help is needed to move the unit to a higher level of JTE success. A new and revised *Annual Service Plan* will help support this task.
- **Contacting units and capturing in *Commissioners Tools* their strengths, needs, and a unit service plan that enabled continuing improvement.**
Our core task remains making significant contacts with units over the course of a year. Commissioner Tools enables commissioners to develop a customized Unit Service Plan to address identified needs.
- **Link unit needs to district operating committee and other resources.**
The concept of linkage is critical to our execution mission. The unit commissioner is a link to the subject matter experts and resources who reside at the district committee level. If certain subject matter expertise does not exist, commissioners should support the efforts of the district Key 3 to recruit and deploy the right resource specialists. The *Unit Service Plan* is used to capture the specifics of the linkages that need to be established.
- **Support timely unit, district, and council charter renewals.** Commissioners own unit retention. A quality program attracts youth and adults to Scouting and is a key factor in retaining them. To fulfill our mission in helping units better serve more youth through Scouting, we should support the district operating committee's efforts to build membership and meet our responsibility to increase unit retention. Effective and timely charter renewal is a key part of retaining units.
- **Supporting unit leaders** by collecting and distributing information, enabling program training, and providing networking opportunities. Encourage your leaders to attend roundtables by explaining what this resource is. Set the example by attending yourself.

Commissioner's Goals

- Enable an increased number of units.
- Enable the retention rate of units.
- Enable implementation of a unit service plan through collaborative detailed assessments and an increased number of significant unit contacts.

Structure - Three Types of Commissioners

Unit commissioners - Perhaps no other members of the unit service team have a more important or demanding responsibility. As friends, coaches, and counselors of unit leaders, unit commissioners operate quietly, generally in the background. They are effective communicators, providing the resources of the district and council to the units they serve. They provide aid to chartered organizations that operate the units through charters from the Boy Scouts of America.

Roundtable commissioners - The district roundtables fall under the guidance of the assistant district commissioner for roundtable. This individual oversees the district roundtables in all program areas, reports to the district commissioner, and works with the district structure. In addition, the assistant district commissioner should make sure the national roundtable guide materials are used so that the units will be getting proper program materials.

Administrative commissioners - Those that are not unit commissioners or roundtable commissioners are administrative commissioners. This includes the district commissioner and assistant district commissioners. The district commissioner leads the commissioner staff of the district, guiding and measuring the district's unit service function of the program. The district commissioner works directly with the district chair and the district professional as part of the district Key 3. Assistant district commissioners work closely with the district commissioner and district executive. This team must have a vision of effective Scouting, and they must communicate that vision—through unit commissioners—to every unit leader in the district.

C.O.A.C.H. Mindset

The best approach to help establish relationships with the leaders in your assigned units is to use is this C.O.A.C.H. mindset:

- **Clarify** – Expectations, needs. Establish level of trust.
- **Observe** – Through evaluation and inspection, conversations and through direct observation.
- **Ask** – Active listening, being present and asking questions. – Status, Issue, Impact.
- **Collaborate** – Engaging in two-way conversations. Ask more questions. Giving and receiving feedback both supportive and constructive.
- **Help** – Be supportive, authentic, consistent, confidential. Provide resources and always follow up.

Commissioner Priorities – 20 minutes (including 10-minute activity)

Prioritize Commissioner Role and Unit Needs

Because of the many programs and activities of Scouting, unit commissioners might find themselves promoting projects, carrying messages, acting as judges, running Friends of Scouting campaigns, etc. While all these activities are unquestionably important, they are not the primary responsibilities of unit commissioners. Unit commissioners do cooperate with other

Scouting personnel to support scouting activities even though they are not responsible for them. So, don't feel guilty about occasionally saying "no" to other requests. Although some commissioners may be registered on a unit committee because they have a Scout in a unit or because of previous personal history in a unit, their principal Scouting obligation must be with commissioner responsibilities. It is recommended that commissioners should not be a member of the unit they serve.

A commissioner might be tempted to give the most attention to the healthiest and most active units because these are fun units to be around. Focus your time on the units that need your help the most so that you can help them become a healthy and active unit. Prioritize unit needs. Commissioner Tools allows you to do this through the detailed assessment.

The most important thing a commissioner can do is get to know their units. Get to know the unit adults and become a friend. Do unit people view you as a person who really cares?

Understand the environment: The chartered organization, history and experience of leaders, etc. When attending unit meeting (committee meetings, pack meetings or troop meetings, etc.), use this opportunity to keep your mouth quiet and your ears open. Be sure to go in uniform. Watch and listen - don't disrupt the program – stay for entire meeting but do not participate unless they ask for assistance. You are a guest and observer. Make note of attendance; depending on kind of meeting attending - is it near 75% of registered scout leaders or scouts?

- Planning: Do things move smoothly? Adult leadership; Are they actively involved? Do they seem to enjoy the meeting? Once the unit adults begin to view you as a friend, they will begin to open up to you and discuss some of the challenges they may have.
- How often should you visit? Monthly visits are best; however, your schedule may not allow you that luxury. Try to work it out so you can visit on a regular basis. Phone calls and emails are okay but a personal visit gives you more opportunity to meet others in the unit outside of the leaders. You can get a good feeling for how a unit is functioning by visiting on a regular basis and watching how the adults, youth and parents interact.
- Unit commissioners should never feel that "all is well" simply because they have casually contacted their units since the last report meeting. When units are moving steadily toward completing the BSA criteria for Journey to Excellence Performance Award units, the unit service plan is successful.
- Beware of the hazard of placing the needs of the district above the needs of the unit. Many units do not understand the role of a district and you will need to develop a relationship with the unit leaders first before sharing too much of what the district does to support units.

Unit visits/contacts - A commissioner's core task remains making **meaningful significant contacts with units** over the course of a year. Commissioner Tools enables commissioners to

develop a customized *Unit Service Plan* to address identified needs. Commissioner Tools enables commissioners to help assess the strengths and needs of the unit and develop a customized *Unit Service Plan* to address those identified needs. In using Commissioner Tools, a commissioner becomes more familiar with the Journey to Excellence award and how each unit is progressing toward their goals in their Journey to Excellence. This is good indicator of the health of the unit.

BSA has defined a Unit Visit or Contact as “a meaningful exchange between a commissioner and 1 or more members of the unit.” Normally you should make a visit to your units monthly. However, unit contacts must be made often enough to accomplish your mission. Only you can say how often that needs to be. You should be close enough to your units to know what is happening and help strengthen their capabilities to deliver a quality program.

Types of Contacts:

- Telephone calls, emails or text messages - to give or receive information or to follow up.
- Visit informally with unit leaders at roundtable. Encourage attendance and participation.
- Attend a unit event.
- Visit your unit as they participate in a district or council event
- When you need quick contact, e-mail works very well but, don't let email substitute for personal interaction.

Don't feel that just because you made contact that you are successful as a commissioner. When your unit is moving toward completion of their Journey to Excellence criteria and have a good unit program, then you are successful as a commissioner.

After your visit – as soon as possible - record as a Simple Assessment in Commissioner Tools located at: my.scouting.org or the Mobile App: MyScouting Tools. As you assist the unit in meeting their needs, the simple assessments you perform will help you track your units. Most people's time is limited, so concentrate your energies on the unit needs you have identified and most important.

Prioritize unit needs

- Track the needs and desired improvement for each of your units. The best way to do this is to complete a simple and/or detailed assessment of each unit in conjunction with the Unit Key 3 (chartered organization representative, committee chair, and unit leader-cubmaster or scoutmaster or crew advisor.)
- A detailed assessment should be completed twice annually. This will help to identify some areas of concern such as lack of trained leaders, no new membership, nonfunctioning or poorly planned programming, financial issues and so on.
- Highlight the most urgent needs and problems. In conjunction with the unit leaders help identify and prioritize those needs.

- After identifying urgent needs and issues build a Unit Service Plan to develop an action plan. (**Handout:** Why Do a Unit Service Plan?)
- Be considerate of your personal time and the time of the unit. Concentrate your commissioner energies on the most urgent needs.

Slide 16 - Unit Priority Issues - Activity and Instructor Led Discussion

Notes: Instructor Led Activity – 10 minutes:

There are issues which must be high priorities for commissioners because they are major threats to unit survival and/or indications that youth may not be receiving a good Scouting program.

Instructor Note: Print out Unit Priority Activity Cards on heavy paper or cardstock (2 sheets/8 cards total).

Form small buzz groups passing out cards to discuss and then report back findings to class. Put slide 15 up on screen using these steps to identify and solve issues.

Using the detailed unit assessment will help you do a thorough review of the unit and how they are doing in key areas of focus.

Set some goals with the Key 3 – allow them to drive the conversation – your job is primarily help them to identify the concerns or problems and set goals to address them. Sometimes the unit may have issues that you are not sure how to deal with. This is a great time to have a discussion with your assistant district commissioner or district commissioner. Together you should be able to find the tools necessary to help with the problem.

For virtual presentation, consider the following modification:

You can use breakout rooms for small group discussions. You might want to assign an individual to guide each breakout and then report back to the larger class.

Units should be encouraged to work on their own problems with your help if necessary, however some problems may be out of their experience level. This is where it is important to link these needs to the resources of the district.

Here are some steps to follow in handling an issue.

- Develop a Unit Service Plan – Use SMART goals - Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely - be sure to list who is responsible for what and what the timeline is for assessing progress.
- Once the plan is in motion, be sure to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan.
- When you reach the deadline date – evaluate the progress towards solving the problem.

- If a problem is not moving toward a resolution, work with the unit leaders to evaluate and come up with a new action plan.
- If you were able to resolve the problem, celebrate and then move to the next area to improve.

Resources

On the BSA National website the Commissioner Landing page has important information for unit service including: News and Newsletters, National Service Team members, Program Support Resources, JTE, Training, Recruiting, Awards & Recognition, Starting & Sustaining Units, Technology, Charter Renewal, Merchandise & Logos.

A useful resource for commissioners is the *Unit Roadmap – Starting, Sustaining & Growing Units 2020*. The *Unit Roadmap* will give you guidance on working with the Key 3 of your units. You can find a copy this manual in PDF form on the National Commissioners website.

Summary/Conclusion – 5 minutes

- There are three types of commissioners.
- Core concepts guide commissioners in serving their units.
- Necessary key skills are needed to be a good commissioner.
- This knowledge and understanding for exceptional unit service is applied by assessing and recording in Commissioner Tools.

Close with the following statement –

“As a commissioner, you have made a personal commitment to Scouting. It’s a commitment of time, effort, and knowledge. It’s a commitment of patience and understanding. It’s a commitment to be a living example for unit leaders, and to lend a helping hand to fellow Scouters.”

Questions? – 5 minutes