

VENTURING MAGAZINE

Unintended Consequences

November 2015

It is informative to start any discussion on how BSA spends its resources and energies in serve to America's youth by reviewing the Mission and Vision of the corporation. It is clear from all published documents that the ideas and ideals of BSA are not founded on maximizing income, donations, or membership numbers, but rather on serving all of America's youth.

MISSION STATEMENT of the BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

The mission of the Boy Scouts of America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law.

VISION STATEMENT of the BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

The Boy Scouts of America will prepare every eligible youth in America to become a responsible, participating citizen and leader who is guided by the Scout Oath and Law.

PURPOSE OF VENTURING

Venturing is a youth development program of the Boy Scouts of America for young men and women who are 14 years of age OR 13 years of age and have completed the eighth grade and under 21 years of age. Venturing's purpose is to provide positive experiences to help young people mature and to prepare them to become responsible and caring adults.

These three statements express a strong commitment to serve America's youth and young people. The reality of this commitment is somewhat different as anyone involved in BSA's Venturing Program already knows. Compared to Cub Scouting and Boy Scouting, Venturing gets tepid support at best, especially at the local level. Conventional wisdom among volunteers is that, since Venturing families generally do not participate in Friends of Scouting fundraising (in other words, donate to their local Councils), there is no obligation by local Councils to provide them with costly resources. Whether this is true or not, it certainly is true that the program has been the victim of benign neglect and that the corporation's rules have made it awkward to serve the age group of Venturing. A recent membership rule change has made it even more difficult and complex to offer this program to young people over the age of 18, who are now considered to be adults for purposes of Youth Protection but are treated as youth members for other purposes.

While the rules appear reasonable, they have unintended consequences for many, many Venturing Crews. When a Venturer turns 18, he or she is now considered to be an adult member of BSA for purposes of registration and youth protection, but a youth for purposes of program. This has created a new, hybrid membership category of young people who must be segregated from adult leaders for some purposes and from youth members for other occasions. This new classification of youth members can result in a need to provide as many as 6 different sleeping quarters for a large group; a space each for male and female youth under the age of 18, another separate space each for males and females aged 18

through 21, and yet another set of spaces for adults over the age of 21. In addition to the new requirement for 18 to 21 year olds, youth with more than a two-year age difference may not tent together, a not unreasonable rule for groups using small backpacking tents.

The biggest problem for Venturing is not in the rules, but in the program's definition and structure. With a potential age span from 13 years all the way through a member's 21st birthday, an active Crew faces several different levels of youth experience and sophistication. The question that occurs is whether it is appropriate to have a program that serves youth with experience levels from the ninth grade all the way through the senior year of college. The question isn't a simple one of youth protection issues, but is more concerned with "appropriateness". On an overnight ski trip, for example, is it a good idea to have group discussions where the youth may be as young as pre-pubescent or possibly past the legal drinking age? This isn't a question about the consumption of alcoholic beverages; it is a question about the wide span of experience levels in this age group. The same concern can be expressed about dating and sexual experience.

There are 162 National Scout Organizations in the world and only five countries where Scouting does not exist (North Korea, the People's Republic of China, Laos, Cuba, and Andorra). This problem is not new, nor is it even a problem in most other countries. The United States is somewhat unique in that we lump ages 13 through 21 into a single program and that we do not allow girls into our groups until puberty (as they enter high school). BSA is also unique in offering separate tracks for all male and coed programs at the same age level (Venturing is coed, Varsity is not). BSA has pursued a policy of benign neglect for Venturing for many, many years and has allowed its total membership to drop by nearly half since 2008.



UK as an example	
Section	Ages
Beavers	6 – 8
Cubs	8 – 10½
Scouts	10½ - 14
Explorer Scouts	14 – 18
Network Scouts	18 – 25

Other countries have solved the challenge of serving older youth by offering Venturing for high school aged youth and Rovers for young people over the age of 18. Typically, Rovers includes more age-appropriate activities, although it is usually focused on camping, high adventure, and outdoor pursuits. Nothing like this is available to the young people of the United States and even the high school program has refocused on ranks and advancement rather than high adventure over the past ten years.

One of the problems for American Scouting is that, because of the age bracketing we have adopted, our youth are unable to participate in many international events targeted specifically to the over 18 age group. There are World Wide Moots (gatherings) for Rovers somewhere in the world every other year, and most international events have special attractions for the over 18 crowd. It is difficult for American Youth 18 or over to participate in these events and even where they are eligible, the events are not promoted widely in BSA.





Now my 19 year-old niece is living with us, attending a local community college, and intensely interested in hiking, snowboarding, and whitewater rafting. She never had the opportunity to learn these hobbies or to participate in Scouting when she was younger. I have taught her the basics of these three sports and she has become quite an outdoorswoman. At her community college there is no club or opportunity for joining group outdoor activities. She wants to pursue these sports within her own age group. Naturally, I mentioned Venturing and she got very enthusiastic. Our dilemma is that her peer group is college students at the community college. Their age runs from 17 to about 23. They have no interest in recruiting younger high school kids, and since they are already engaged in the real-life program of college, they have no interest in Scout-like recognition, ranks, or badges.



This situation at the local community college reminds me of my years of experience with Exploring before the split between Career Interest and Special Interest Posts resulted in the creation of Venturing. In those days, when there were about 1 million Explorers, Posts organized around a special interest and recruited both youth and adult members around that theme. A scuba Post would often be sponsored by a scuba shop, a police Post was likely to be sponsored by a police department, and a climbing Post would often be affiliated with an adult climbing club. The adult leaders were often subject matter experts who enjoyed sharing their hobbies or careers with young people, and Posts were able to collect specialized equipment and training to support activities in their own specialty. Recruiting was simpler, since the appeal of each Post was easy for its members to explain and even easier for prospective members to understand.



This model would work exceptionally well for this older 18-25 age group if there was an accommodation in Venturing or a new program like Roving was created to organize around. It is possible to use Venturing to accommodate such a program, as the under 18 crowd can register as youth and the 18 and up group can all register as adults. There is nothing to offer this age group, however, aside from liability insurance and a well-developed, if awkward (for this age group), youth protection protocol. BSA has offered only lukewarm support for its current young adult programs. There is no reason to believe that the organization is interested in serving 18-25 year olds. The opportunity is there, as this is a very difficult age for young people socially. They have left their high school social circles and have been cast adrift in a sea of commuter students, part time jobs, and a near total absence of clubs aimed at their age group.

This is a very difficult age group to serve, but if BSA took its own Mission and Vision Statements seriously, we would see at least lip service to our young adults. At a minimum, Venturing presents an opportunity to be used at the high school level and could be augmented to serve college age youth. There is nothing like this for young people who have finished their high school years. The cynics among us believe that this is ultimately the result of a failure of teens' families to donate money or of the teens themselves to sell Boy Scout popcorn. I hope this is not the real reason, but I can come up with no other reasonable explanation aside from a possible organizational antipathy to allowing girls in Boy Scouting.

Article provided by: Joe Garrett

BSA had Rover Scouts from 1928-52. Michael Brown shares this information on www.seniorsscoutinghistory.org/seniorsscoutsite/roverscout.html.