

VENTURING MAGAZINE

What's in Store for Venturing? Part II by Joe Garrett

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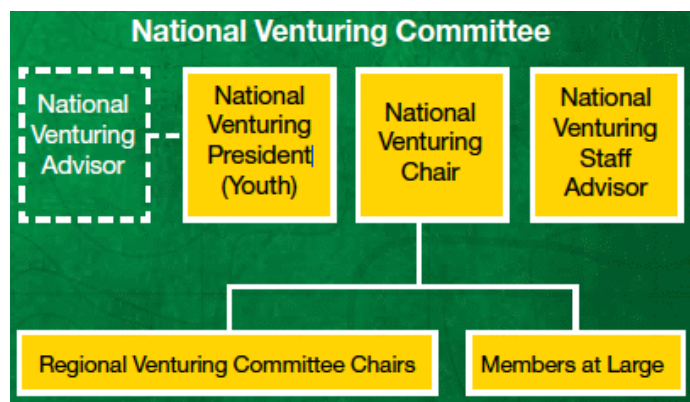
Last September, I wrote an essay on the future of Venturing in light of the many changes that had occurred since our National Office reorganized in 2008.

www.venturingmag.org/archives/Venturing1209.pdf

After that reorganization, many aspects of the Venturing program fell under the purview of committees with little familiarity or experience with Venturing or its coed membership. Our unique training courses became "program-wide" and were adapted to be offered to Boy Scouts and Venturers, mixing the two programs. Since the Boy Scout program is not coed and has a different set of Methods for program delivery, problems arose. The use of the Boy Scout Patrol Method, mandatory uniforms, integration of older youth who have no knowledge of Boy Scout traditions, and use of course staff with no knowledge of Venturing all created friction and discouraged Venturers from participating.

After the recent National Annual Meeting, the Boy Scouts of America reversed its policy banning gay youth from membership, garnering a great deal of interest and press coverage. This event, which disproportionately affected Venturing, overshadowed another important event. A new Road Map for Venturing was announced, the result of a two year study by a dedicated group of Venturing volunteers. At first blush, the announcement raises many questions, especially in the context of many of the negative things that have happened to Venturing over the past 5 years.

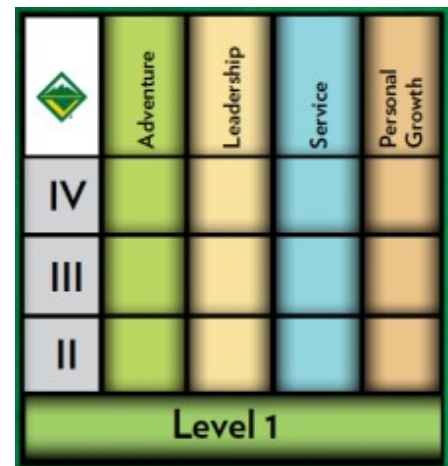
After a few days to digest the document, however, I am encouraged. The results and recommendations of the study are published in a PowerPoint presentation which can be viewed at www.scouting.org/scoutsource/Venturing/NewProgAnnouncement.aspx. After a brief problem statement in which our membership losses are described and the fact that less than 1% of Venturers participate in the Awards program is disclosed, the document dives right into the real problems.



On page 5, the first page after the introduction, a new leadership and management structure is announced for Venturing. At the National level, a National Youth President, a National Venturing Chair, and a National Staff Advisor (a professional Scouter) will be named. This structure will be replicated at the Region, Council, and District levels. The Chair positions at each organizational level are for two year terms with a Chair-elect and an immediate Past President also serving on the Venturing

Committees at each level for continuity. This scheme provides for stability in the chair positions, allows for the immediate past chair to mentor, and gives the chair-elect a chance to understudy both the incumbent and the immediate past chair. The existence of a National Venturing Staff Advisor gives the program a voice within the professional staff at the National Office. At the Regional, Council, and District levels, the committee will include Members at Large who will serve two year, renewable terms. In my view, this organizational structure will go a long way toward solving the vacuum we have suffered in for the past five years.

The plan goes from here to describe a new emphasis on Four Program Areas/Pillars. These are Adventure (first and foremost), Leadership, Service, and Personal Growth. Adventure remains at the center of all Venturing endeavors. Crews will continue to pick their own special focus, but the adventure of it all will be emphasized in future literature and program materials. Leadership, which has been somewhat of a stealth goal, comes to the forefront in the new model. The new materials will emphasize and encourage leadership and mentoring within each Crew.



The next Pillar is Service. This is a Scouting value that may have been overlooked in official Venturing materials in the past. For Venturing leaders who have experience within Boy Scouting or Cub Scouting, this may have been second nature, but we must all keep in mind that many Venturing adults and even more Venturers have never been involved in Scouting before. The original idea for the Venturing Corps of Discovery www.venturingcorps.com was to emphasize this aspect of Venturing Service. The Corps of Discovery is a Servant Leadership Society (not an honorary society), intended to encourage Crews to remember service to community and to Scouting.

Personal Growth is the final Pillar. Once again, this area of scouting was often neglected in Venturing. The subject barely comes up until a youth member starts working on the Gold Award, after completing the Bronze Award which typically can take more than a year. Given that a very, very small number of Venturers ever work on the recognition awards, it is clear that personal growth rarely gets mentioned in most young peoples' Venturing careers.

"The Four Pillars" will be mapped into the revised Venturing Recognitions in a way that better emphasizes our Scouting values than the previous scheme. After joining and "becoming a Venturer", a new member will be faced with three progressive recognition levels. These levels have yet to be named, but I sincerely hope we can stay with the current, familiar progression of Bronze, Gold, and Silver. The first level of achievement will no longer be as program specific as the current Bronze Awards are, with their 5 different interest areas to choose from. The former Bronze Award requirements will be incorporated into their higher specialty awards, the Ranger, Trust, Quest, and Quartermaster Awards. In other words, they will no longer be part of the "path to Silver", if that is what the highest award is ultimately named. At the higher levels of the new recognition scheme, candidates will be engaged in Crew leadership, project management, and mentorship of younger members. A larger, more complex "capstone project" will also be required of each "Silver" candidate. This is new, and is a move toward equivalency with the Boy Scout's Eagle Award. The point of the Eagle project is leadership and management, not "good works", so this should be well received by our young people as an opportunity to manage a complex project with some real value to the community.

Some new elements that are introduced in this plan are resume construction, writing of curriculum vitae, (job, and college) applications, interviewing skills, and time management.

Adult leader training is getting a tune-up, too. Venturing Leader Specific Training is being augmented with Crew Committee specific training. This should help offload some duties from Advisors and empower Committee members (who are often parents) to get involved and to lend a hand.

There is nothing in the PowerPoint presentation about uniforms. This has been a hot button issue, and is probably a red herring. The current policy, because of its wording, has been a source of confusion since

the first days of Venturing. There is an official Green Uniform with grey slacks or shorts for Venturing. Crews are not required to use it and members certainly are not required to buy it. The decision is left to the individual Crew. Instead, a Crew can adopt an unofficial uniform of a t-shirt, a polo shirt or some other distinctive item of clothing. A crew can also elect to not use a uniform at all. Uniforms are an important component of Cub Scouting, Boy Scouting, and Sea Scouting. They are not, however, central to Venturing. The confusion has always been over whether a Crew can modify the Official Green Uniform to its own liking. The answer, in general, is no. The Official Uniform is described and regulated by BSA's Insignia Guide. Another source of confusion is whether the Green Uniform is required at BSA events, camps, and High Adventure Bases. The answer is "maybe". Since the official policy of BSA is that Venturers may adopt their own uniforms, it would follow that those custom uniforms should satisfy any uniform requirement at any BSA event or facility. Unfortunately, this is not the case and even where it is stated policy, individual Scouters have been known to approach Venturers and chastise them about their clothing.

It is possible that a new uniform policy will be introduced, making the green uniform the only official wear for Venturers. If this happens, it will only affect Venturers who wish to participate in BSA sponsored events like Camporees, Jamborees, Scout Camps, and the like. It would just drive a wedge between Scouting and less traditional Venturing Crews. Such a rule would be unwise and unenforceable if applied at the unit level. From what I can gather such a regulation is not being considered.

I am encouraged by the new Road Map to Venturing. At first I was skeptical and maybe a little paranoid. A careful reading, though, shows that there are lots of good ideas in there. I have provided the links, and I hope you will go take a look yourself.