

Strategies for Retaining Older Boy Scouts

Although the Boy Scout Program serves boys ages 11-17, the typical Boy Scout is twelve years old, and boys over fourteen are a small minority in most Troops. In many cases, their Troop's program tends to focus on the bulk of the boys in the younger age range, and, unfortunately, often neglects the needs of many of the older boys.

If Troops want to keep all their boys active, they need to provide a program for all the boys! Most commonly, the program for older boys is to serve as leaders for the younger boys. This function is very attractive for many older Scouts, who thrive in this environment, but it won't serve for all the older boys all the time – Troops need to offer something more for them.

Often, Troops aren't large enough to provide multiple tiers of program (i.e. separate hikes for different skill levels). Here are a few concepts which Troops may consider to extend their program to older boys, and keep them active in Scouting:

The Venture Patrol: Your Troop forms a special Patrol, consisting of boys over thirteen which meet other qualifications established by the Troop (i.e. First Class Rank). These boys remain active in their regular Patrols, and belong to the Venture Patrol “on the side”. Periodically (perhaps once per month), the Venture Patrol meets separately from the rest of the Troop and plans special activities just for themselves. A few times a year, the Venture Patrol conducts its own special outing (using a Troop tour permit) which fulfills the desires of the older boys and keeps them active in the Troop. The Troop designates one Assistant Scoutmaster to serve as the Venture Patrol Coach. The Venture Patrol Leader and Coach should have the Venture Patrol as their primary responsibility in the Troop.

The “partnered” Venturing Crew: Your Troop “spins off” a new Unit, which is chartered as a Venturing Crew. Most likely, this new Crew has the same chartered partner as the Troop, and may have many of the same members on its Committee. Most of the Crew members are also registered as Troop members, and may frequently participate in Troop activities. The Crew has a separate leadership structure and holds separate meetings and activities planned by its members. Frequently, the Troop and Crew hold joint events, and the Crew often hosts special functions and provides service to the Troop. The top Officers and Advisors of the Crew do not hold top leadership positions in the Troop, but often work closely with Troop leaders.

The “neighborhood” Venturing Crew: Your Troop finds (or even helps create) a local Crew which has a program attractive to your older boys, and encourages many of them to join the Crew in addition to being active in the Troop. Some Scouts may elect to be only active in the Crew, which is an indication that they were ready to leave the Troop soon, and this keeps them active in Scouting. This Crew could also have Scouts from other neighboring Troops as well as members without a Boy Scout background. Your District can help you to identify local Crews.

The “special interest” Venturing Crew: In your broader geographical area, there are likely to be several Crews with specific interest programs. Climbing, music, soccer, historical reenactment, sailing, drama, and shooting are some examples. It's common for Scouts to join one *or more* special interest Crews. They may have to travel some distance to participate, but older Scouts are generally capable of making those arrangements. Ask your Council to assist you with identifying special interest Crews, and even consider looking in neighboring Councils. Also consider career-based Exploring Posts for this purpose.

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