

Troop Selection Guide and Advice

You know joining the Boy Scouts of America is the right thing for your son. Whether you are joining for the first time or transferring from an existing troop, finding information about local troops is sometimes time-consuming and frustrating. And how do you know if the troop that your son wants to join is a good troop? We are providing this guide to help you assist your son as he makes this important decision. It includes brief answers for many of the questions you may have for each troop and suggests other questions you and your son might want to ask the troops that you visit.

Remember: The choice of a troop is a personal decision. Every troop is different, and you need to find the one that is right for your son and your family.

There is no “designated” troop that your son must join.

We recommend that you and your son visit several troops, so that you can see how different troops do things. Every troop has its own traditions, activities, and level of adventure. You need to find one that is right for your son. Talk to the Scoutmaster and see if it possible to attend an overnight campout as a guest of a troop. Most troops welcome any new Scout that would like to join them. You may also transfer from any troop for a small fee. It is far better to transfer to another troop in the area than to leave Scouting.

My son is a Webelos Scout. Do I need to join the troop my Webelos leader joins?

No! All members of a den need not join the same troop. In fact, it is very important that your son find a troop that HE is comfortable with and will enjoy being in. He is much more likely to stay in the troop and advance in the program is he is with a troop that matches his needs ... and his needs may be different from others in his Den. You and your son need to make this decision independently of others in his Webelos den.

How do I contact a troop?

The Last Frontier Council of the Boy Scouts of America has a list of Troops and their contacts at the Scout office. Customer Service can provide you with the contact phone numbers, location, and meeting nights for the troops in your school district. You should contact several troops in your area to set up visits. Be sure to go with your son to help him assess the troop. You may choose any troop in any school district to visit or join if there is space in the unit. If you need more information on troops, please contact the Scout Office.

The troops of the Last Frontier Council do have one request of you - always call one of the contact persons before visiting the troop. Sometimes troops have meetings off-site, and calling ahead will assure that you don't miss them.

What should I ask when I visit?

During your visit, there are things to ask and observe. There is no “right” answer to these questions, but you want a troop you and your son will feel comfortable with. Don’t be afraid to ask about the troop. They will be proud to tell you about themselves.

Here are some questions you should ask when visiting a troop:

How many registered Scouts are in the troop? How many registered Leaders?

While troops will vary in size, there should be a cadre of Leadership appropriate to the number of boys in the troop. Do the boys tend to stick with the program year to year? Does the troop hold a “Quality Unit” award?

What is the age range of the Scouts? Is the troop currently able to hold the interest of the older as well as younger Scouts? Do they offer (or plan to offer) any “High Adventure” Scouting?

Younger Scouts traditionally work on their Rank requirements so they can advance through the Tenderfoot, Second Class and First Class Ranks in their first year in Scouting. Much of their attention in meetings and on campouts is devoted to their basic Scout skills for these requirements. As the Scouts get into their teens, it is necessary to challenge them in order to hold their interest. Scouting has established several “High Adventure” programs for Scouts who are 13 years of age or older. They may begin high-level backpacking, canoeing, rock climbing, scuba diving, sailing, and more. Troops may travel to Philmont Scout Ranch for rugged mountain backpacking, Sea Base for sailing and scuba, to Sommers Canoe Base for a wilderness lake experience, to a national or international Jamboree or to other high adventure sites.

Who are the Scout Leaders in the troop? Are the Scoutmaster, Assistant Scoutmasters, and Committee Chairman trained? What training have they attended and when?

This is a very important part of your consideration of a troop. A trained leader should know BSA policies on programs, safety, and youth protection. To be considered “Trained”, Leaders must have taken training courses offered by the district and council. They may then wear a “Trained” patch on their sleeves. Ask what level of training the troop leadership has and when the training course was taken. Most training courses (except Woodbadge) should be renewed every 2-5 years. High levels of training are desired.

Boy Scout Leader Training offered in our Council includes:

- Fast Start (instructional videotape) The Basics of the Boy Scout Program and Patrol Method
- Youth Protection (90 minutes video and discussion) (note: this training is available for all adults in the troop, and should be encouraged of all who camp with the boys)

- Scoutmaster Fundamentals/Adult Basic Leader Training (weekend course including overnight)
- Woodbadge (Highest level of Scout Leader Training: one full week or three full weekend campout/class sessions)

Is the troop “boy run”? What is their feeling about boy leadership?

In Boy Scouting, most troops aim to train their boys for leadership. Each troop has a Senior Patrol Leader, elected by all the boys in the troop, who with his Assistant Senior Patrol Leader takes the helm for leadership within the troop. The troop will also be organized into Patrols, units of 5 to 8 Scouts who function together, similar to a Cub den. They will have an elected Patrol Leader and Assistant Patrol Leader. In a young troop, the boys will obviously need more adult assistance in running meetings, etc., but in an established troop with older Scouts, you should see evidence of “boys leading boys”, not adults running the program.

What is their activity program like?

Ask to see a copy of their yearly program schedule. You’ll want to see how often they camp out. The outdoor program recommends 9-12 campouts per year, including Summer Camp. Do they camp in the winter? Do they participate in the District/Council activities such as the Camporees and Expo? Do they offer special activities at meetings? Do they invite speakers on certain topics?

What is a “typical” meeting like?

Is it “boy run”? Is it upbeat? Are the boys kept busy? Is it fun? Do they show respect to the flag ceremony, to the program, to the adults, to each other? Is good discipline evident within the program?

What are their uniform requirements?

Most troops require full uniform for all meetings and for District- or Council sponsored campouts. Others require only the uniform shirt. Others have designated uniform meeting days. Others wear the activity (red polo) shirt, or a specially designed troop t-shirt. You will probably want to choose a troop that feels the same about the uniform as you and your son do. Ask if there is a uniform ‘bank’ of uniform parts available until you can get the entire uniform, or if there is assistance for purchasing a complete uniform. Does the troop attend Summer Camp? What percentage of the troop attended last year? Where do they go? Do they always go to the same camp? How many Leaders attend camp with the Scouts? Are those Leaders trained?

Summer camp offers a tremendous opportunity for Scouts to experience the fun and excitement of camping while affording the chance to achieve rank advancements and merit badges. Our Council operates Slippery Falls Scout Ranch, but it is not necessary that the troops attend this camp. Some troops attend Slippery Falls every year for one

or two weeks, while others go to Boy Scout Camps in nearby Councils for a change of pace.

How do they utilize the Advancement & Merit Badge Program?

Some troops use the Advancement and Merit Badge Program as the cornerstone of their program. Their campouts and meetings center on helping the boys advance within the format outlined by the Boy Scouts of America. Some focus meetings on merit badge work. Other troops may feel that the advancements and merit badges are secondary and plan activities independent of them. Their Scouts earn all merit badges on their own. Clearly, either system can function well, and boys can work with either one to advance all the way to Eagle Scout.

What can a parent expect in terms of fees?

Fees vary from troop to troop. Most Troops have an annual fee, which covers membership and basic materials, including badges and awards. It usually does not include uniform, camping fees, meals, travel or other special activity costs. You'll want to know what additional fees will likely be charged during the course of the year.

Observe how the boys interact.

How do they treat the visitors? You'll want to join a troop where your son feels comfortable. Does your son need a group where he already knows some boys? If he does not know other boys initially, do they seem like a group that will treat a newcomer well?

What can I do to help?

Troops require lots of adult support. There are many different levels of involvement in a troop, from leadership roles, to serving on the Troop Committee, to helping with campouts, to driving to events, etc. We hope you can get involved with your son as he continues on in Scouting. It's been our experience that successful Scouts and successful troops have parents who can make time to be involved.

Obviously, there are many other questions you may wish to ask of a troop relative to your son's interests or goals in Scouting. We hope this information gives you a starting point to help you assess the troops you visit. Good luck!