

Cultivating Adult Leadership in BSA



Evidence shows that BSA has helped develop young scouts into strong leaders. But does it do the same for adult volunteers?

This is just one of the questions asked by researchers in the **BEST Study**, a first-of-its-kind national study. Researchers tried to answer this specific question by focusing on the Scoutmaster training for BSA troop leaders, who are critical to BSA's success.

Researchers hoped that the findings could help BSA and volunteer leaders deliver a consistent program to promote positive development in youth. In addition, the findings could help advance the youth character field overall, which has little research about adult leadership in youth programs.

METHODOLOGY

Before they could determine the **impact** of BSA on adult leaders, researchers had to understand the **model** through which adult leadership is taught in BSA. From September to November 2018, 4 researchers, in teams of 2, attended 4 trainings--3 in the Northeast and 1 in the Western region—each between 2.25 to 4 hours long. They recorded more than 100 pages of observation notes focused on 4 domains of leadership transmission:



Training
Attendance



*Adherence to
BSA Materials



Adherence to
BSA Methods



*Sharing Key
Resources

BSA's model aims to offer well-attended in-person Scoutmaster trainings led by facilitators who use the official BSA syllabus to provide content through specific delivery methods and share particular resources to support Scoutmasters.

STUDY FINDINGS

Successes to Maintain

Of the 4 domains of the BSA Scoutmaster training model, 2 (**Adherence to BSA Materials & Sharing Key Resources**) were present at strong levels.

- **All observed trainings included modules on the official BSA syllabus' 7 core components.** Facilitators developed a learning culture by teaching critical Scoutmaster skills.
- **All observed trainings shared BSA required resources to some extent.** Of the 21 resources, 5 were not shared at all, 4 were shared at 25% of trainings, 3 were shared at 50% of trainings, 2 were shared at 75%, and 1 was shared at 100%.

Opportunities for Improvement

- **Many in-person trainings had low attendance or high cancellation rates.** 40% of trainings during the study period were cancelled due to lack of registrants, and 100% had 6 or fewer attendees.
- **Many BSA required delivery methods were not used at trainings.** BSA expects training content to be reinforced through 14 specific games, activities, simulations, discussions and demonstrations, of which 8 were absent from all observed trainings, 4 were only present at 25% of trainings, and 1 was present at 50% of trainings.

7 Core Components of Scoutmaster Training

Aims & Methods of Scouting
Role of the Scoutmaster
The Patrol Method
The Troop Meeting
Advancement
The Support Team
Annual Planning



Notably, though discussed, the **Patrol Method, a central part of BSA, was not modelled at any trainings**, which may impact Scout experiences.

Next Steps

Future **BEST Study** questions can help identify areas of BSA to: celebrate and showcase in practice and research and improve BSA programming to best foster leadership in both youth and adults. For more information, go to bsabeststudy.org.