



BUILDING EVIDENCE IN SCOUTING TOGETHER

BSA BEST STUDY DATA USE RETREAT

November 1 & 2, 2019

BSA Trainings Overall



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Feedback from Scouters: BSA Trainings Overall

What do SMs/ASMs identify as benefits of training?

Many of the training benefits from Scoutmaster Specific Training, Introduction to Outdoor Leadership Skills and Wood Badge were also noted by adults in interviews about BSA trainings overall. The opportunity to learn from other adult leaders (67%), hands-on and experiential learning (34%), knowledge of BSA as an organization as well as the youth-led philosophy and strategies, developing skills in outdoor activities, leadership and working with youth (79%) are all benefits leaders mentioned of BSA training in general.

What do SMs/ASMs identify as the drawbacks of training?

Adult leaders did note some general drawbacks of BSA trainings in their interviews. These include having a bad trainer (11%), bad training design (22%), training being dry or boring (10%), time-consuming trainings (25%), unclear requirements (8%), and problems with the training website (13%).

SCOUTER THOUGHTS ON:

In-Person or Online Training?

Adult leaders' interview responses indicated that both in-person and online training formats have benefits and drawbacks. Overall, adult leaders reported that the online training format is convenient (21%) and well suited for rule or policy-based information, such as Youth Protection Training. Some leaders, however, were critical of online training and the ability to "click through" trainings without learning the material or having the opportunity to ask questions.

The in-person training format was described as beneficial for hands-on learning (9%), such as IOLS and Wood Badge, and for the interaction with other Scouters (23%). The leaders liked the networking aspect of in-person training, including learning about the experiences of other leaders, the opportunity to ask for suggestions, hearing new ideas, and learning different approaches for teaching material to Scouts. Responses also indicated that adult leaders would attend more in-person trainings if they were offered more frequently, were more accessible, and required less of a time commitment. For instance:

...so this is a critical component to being trained as a Scoutmaster, Introduction to Outdoor Leadership Skills wherein the assistant Scoutmasters and Scoutmasters have to go and participate in an in-person training session for 24 hours at the camp and basically do all these requirements. And that's fantastic. However, it is offered one time a year throughout our entire district.

Testing Out

Leaders reported that the trainings were at times repetitive and redundant (27%). Several leaders expressed an interest in an option to test out of certain trainings for people who already have the knowledge and skills covered by the training. This was true both of required trainings, like IOLS, and some of the additional safety-related trainings which expire and need to be retaken regularly.

The ability to test out could also help address the issue raised by some more experienced Scouters that SMST and IOLS are redundant and do not offer knowledge or skills that they have not already attained through their experience in Scouting.

But, I also think that, for some of these trainings, like youth protection, I would prefer to be able to just take a test and re-certify instead of having to take the time and watch all the videos over and over and over again!

They had talked for a while about having an opt-out for Scoutmasters who had been with their troops for a while or as assistants or whatever because really what they teach you in IOLS is kind of the basic skills for helping the kids through their scout craft and how patrols work and all that sort of thing, but they never really got around to that. They briefly played with the test out provision and never got around to that either, but it's a little-they haven't looked for ways to make that, to reduce the time commitments.

There are some that I really wish could be offered, like the Introduction to Outdoor Leadership Skills. I know a Scoutmaster that's on the sheriff's department. He's an Eagle scout. I know he can do it. I just wish he could test out... If they had an ability to test out some of the courses, I'd have more trained leaders.

Active vs. Passive Training

Some adult leaders commented about the way information is presented in BSA trainings; multiple adult leaders noted that oftentimes trainers are reading information

from a slide, and that there is not as much active learning in trainings as they would like to see. Considering the fact that most leaders reported liking hands-on and experiential learning, it is not surprising that they do not enjoy more passive styles of training.

Well, it's the kind of training where essentially someone's reading you a slide in front of you with very obvious answers to the questions and you're all answering at the same time. So I just don't know that it was teaching anybody anything.

So Wood Badge, even though I found it extremely beneficial and I did reignite and reinvigorate that training spirit, but a lot of the course material was presented in Microsoft PowerPoint format. And, even worse, when we broke into smaller groups, into the patrols, with just five, six people per patrol, our instructor read from a printed out PowerPoint presentation that was put into a white notebook. You know, those trapper keepers or what it's called, the three ring binders. So, again, that's a passive learning event. Leaning down on a picnic table, having somebody read what was originally a PowerPoint presentation. There's no experiential learning value in that whatsoever.

Training (Un)availability

Many adult leaders lamented the fact that trainings they were interested in were not available to them, either because they were offered infrequently or not at times and places that they were able to attend (20%). A couple of leaders talked about trying to take trainings through other Councils, but noted that there were issues with that as well—it is hard to find out about the trainings being offered by other Councils, and sometimes those trainings are not recognized by other Councils.

And I think those trainings should be offered more, they're not offered enough, in particular, in our council.

Probably the other thing I would suggest too is just do some sort of outreach in my area, a particular area, if they had a central place where the different councils can list their training dates so that people from our council can go to different councils and train depending upon where they're available.

And also that it is advertised efficiently. Sometimes we have to go digging, like calling other councils to find out whether they have any training coming up.

Recommendations from the BEST Study Team

Clarify Training Objectives and Requirements for Participants

And sometimes something like a guide or syllabus as to why you're doing this, I think would be ... Or, even if it is just a guide, not necessarily a college syllabus, but something that makes sense to the end user as to why they're doing this, and why it's necessary.

We believe that adult leaders would benefit if objectives of each training are made clear from the outset. BSA could provide a brief user-friendly guide throughout the training that lists these objectives, explains why they are important, and how they plan to reach them. Several leaders suggested a syllabus of sorts, and others talked about bulleted lists with 10 key points. Creating these focused guides at the outset of each training would also allow BSA to more consistently get feedback from participants about whether they felt the training met stated objectives.

Additionally, we suggest downloadable flow charts for leaders that describe both the progression of Scouts through Scouting (for new leaders), and also the variety of trainings that are offered and which ones should be attended and by whom.

Address Website Woes

I haven't really had, I guess, other than navigating some of the BSA website. That's pretty much the trying to find the different trainings, or once I've taken the training, getting the certification to show up.

Whenever they changed Youth Protection module, and they went to the different setup on the internet, we had all kinds of problems with system failure from their side. So you would complete it and it wouldn't record it. And then you'd go back over and you had to start over again.

Improving the navigation and functioning of the training website would be very beneficial to leaders, especially considering how much training BSA offers online. Some ideas on what to address:

Make it easier for participants to get credit for completing trainings. After trainees complete their session, have an automatized way of entering this info in (maybe by trainers) so that leaders don't have to print our completion certificates and do extra work

after already attending and completing a training they paid for. This frustration was voiced repeatedly.

Improve Availability of Trainings

It's just the time involved in that and scheduling. There are only maybe one or two opportunities throughout the course of the year.

To find those trainings, sometimes you have to go across to another district, or across to another council, across to another region. But not all of them are recognized. My troop has gone to summer camp this year at [LOCATION], and they're offering COPE training. Well, it's in a different... different council, and my council doesn't have an agreement with their council to recognize that training. So making trainings universal and available across borders, I guess you could say.

Adult leaders in BSA value training, but it can be difficult for them to attend even when they are willing to commit the time to in-person training. Strategically offer local trainings to meet the needs of adult leaders would help ensure that more leaders are adequately trained. This could include developing a centralized national database of training availability. Allowing leaders to attend trainings that are offered by different Councils would also help address this.

It may also be useful to consider synchronous online conferencing options to maintain some of the benefits of in-person interactive training with the convenience of online training. Then adult volunteers could have face time with trainers and vice versa, and could benefit from hearing the questions and comments of other remote attendees despite not being in person together.

Additional Training Ideas: Requests from Scouters

In interviews, many adult leaders discussed specific situations they felt unprepared for as a leader. Some of these participants have discovered how to handle these situations through trial and error over the years as a troop leader, and others stated that BSA resources specific to these situations would be helpful. These include:

- Working with youth who have special needs (i.e. behavioral problems, attention issues, impulse control problems)
- Working with parents
 - How to work with parents who want their Scout to achieve rank advancement or Eagle Scout at an unrealistic pace
 - How to work with parents who are unsupportive of their Scout participating in activities or camping
 - How to help parents understand the “boy-led” model
- Strategies to get parents more involved with the troop
 - How to engage the “drop off only” parent
 - How to engage parents to participate without starting them in leadership roles
- Strategies for coping with tragedy
 - How to handle the death of a troop leader, Scout, or parent of a Scout
 - How to handle exposure to trauma in the community, such as troop members exposed to a school shooting
- Working with a low income troop
- Working with mixed-gender troops
- Working with adolescent boys (info on adolescent development)
- Training on youth leadership and how to develop leadership skills