

# Scouting Publicity Guide

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## Introduction

This guide on generating publicity and interest around Scouting events was developed by Bill Ragsdale in the Yolo District of the Golden Empire Council of the Boy Scouts of America.

We feel that you'll find it very useful in generating publicity around your events, Scouting in particular, but also for nearly any other event that you're planning.

Bill's support of Scouting has extended over decades and he's a keen champion of Radio Scouting, amateur radio in Scouting. His ham radio call sign is K6KN and he is trustee of his Scout unit's club station, W6BSA.

Thanks, Bill, for creating this excellent guide. We hope it will be of use to many both inside and outside of Scouting.

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## Making A Scouting Event Happen

Most events are driven by an individual, or perhaps by a team, with the love for a particular activity. But more is needed than passion for an event to happen. You need three components for a successful event:

1. **The Event Structure:** place, time, room/building/camp, budget, etc.
2. **Program Content:** What will we do? What resources are needed? Who will staff the event? What supplies and equipment is needed?
3. **Publicity:** How to get people so interested in your event they will attend it instead doing something else?

In the Scouting world #1 will probably be done through your Council Program people, your District Chair or District Program Chair. At a unit level the Unit Committee would sponsor the event.

Item #2 will come from volunteers: Scout leaders, community folks or both.

That brings us to item #3, how to build the attendance of your event through publicity.

## Why This Guide?

For the Scouting activities for your unit and District as many as 30% of families fail to attend simply because they don't understand the value of the event, didn't get the word in time, or later forgot. In this guide you will learn how to gain their participation, grow your program, and increase retention.

We have nine hundred families in the Yolo District. Many are deeply involved with their unit and District. But many are only lightly aware of their unit's activities and completely unaware of the District events. Communication is the key to motivate their participation. This is your insider's view to the full range of techniques and how to use them effectively.

You can't rely on a simple email message to create action. It can only create awareness and that awareness quickly fades as the reader hits the Delete button. It is difficult to get your email placed on a refrigerator door where all family scheduling is done. As email use increases so does the clutter. Plus some families still lack email contact. To build participation we need a clear, motivating message delivered by a variety of paths to all our families.

The worst type of notice is a non-Scouting event (basketball game) sent two weeks before the event with a request to send to all District families. It is non-Scouting, short notice, and carried by email. Now you'll learn the ways that work.

If you are planning an event or wish your Scouting families to join in an event you need take advantage of all the ways to reach and motivate them. This report will be your roadmap. It applies to District or unit events, simply skip the items that don't apply. The key parts are:

- The priority people place when receiving a message,
- Forming your message,
- The time schedule for your message(s) and
- The path they should take.

## The Benefits Of Promotion

It's more than just attendance. When you promote your event more effectively you can bring in more volunteers, expand your budget, get feedback on future event themes, facilitate youth advancement, and even help recruiting.

## Message Priority

The method of making contact forms the most important factor determining whether a message will be received and later acted upon.

For example, you will always open a hand-written note from your mother. You may likely hang-up on a recorded telephone message or delete email from an unknown sender. But both messages may be suggesting you attend the important fundraiser at the Scout Cabin and you would like to go. In the later case the message path causes its loss of effectiveness.

The message formats in the order of importance are:

1. Face to face meeting, one on one
2. Personal phone call
3. Personal letter ("Dear Susie")
4. A recommendation from a friend.
5. A flyer, mailed directly that resides under a magnet, on the refrigerator door.
6. Face to face at a unit meeting, Roundtable or District Committee meeting.
7. Form letter ("Dear Troop Parent" newsletter of unit announcements)
8. Personal email (one to one)

9. Group email in a personal format.
10. Group email in an “event notice” format
11. A social media posting, Facebook or ??
12. Article in the a newsletter specific to Scouting
13. A web page linked from another source
14. Posting on a Scouting web-calendar.
15. A flyer left on the table at Roundtable.
16. Ad or a notice in a newspaper (as only a fraction of the city reads the paper).

Why so many ways? Research has shown you need 4 to 7 contacts to build commitment. Plus you also need social networking support when one parent says to another: “My son is going. Is yours?” No single method can contact all your possible attendees. You need multiple contacts through multiple methods.

Note email is way down the list on effectiveness. It is easy for you to send but much less likely be acted on than other formats. You cannot rely only on email but must also activate the other communication paths. If you were announcing the Governor was to have dinner at your home would you invite your relatives by email? On the other hand, email is a good attendance reminder just before a meeting, after they are already signed up and ready to attend your event.

## Getting Started

The core of your promotion is a summary article. See the sample at the end of this guide. You will re-edit it and build it into many uses: flyer, registration, webpage, reminder email, etc. When writing it, you will gather together the dates, benefits, costs, and facts of your event. Once this is done all other publicity steps will proceed smoothly.

About five months before an event write an article of about 400 words, with about three sentences per paragraph. Here's the critical information:

- What, who, where, when, why plus conditions and circumstances in the first paragraph.
- Then who will benefit from attending.
- Then a call to action and how to register.
- Next how to get an event flyer or guide.
- Then benefits from attending.
- Then reports from prior years and a quote from someone about the event.
- Add a logo, patch or photo, possibly from the prior year.

Remember, an article in a print publication will likely be edited down to fit space available. This is usually done by deleting from the end backward toward the beginning. So put the important information in the first three paragraphs.

Your summary article will be re-edited for several uses.

- Your event flyer
- Your letter to parents for a unit activity
- A press release to your local newspaper if the public is invited.
- A web page at the GEC web-site.
- The introduction to an Event Guide.
- An event notice at the Yolo District section of the GEC web-site.
- The event registration page at the GEC web-site.
- An article in the Yolo District Pleasant Pheasant newsletter.
- A summary included in the Yolo District email, usually twice a month.
- A support item to include with solicitation of local company donations.

## Your Schedule

We all know unit committees and Green Bar meetings plan their unit's Scouting program about six months ahead. We must synchronize with that process to optimize our communication program.

The suggested lead times are:

<b>7 months</b>	Planning for a major event like the Camporee or Spring Cub Camp starts this early and at least needs to set the date and theme.
<b>5 months</b>	Summary article and promotion plan. See the sample at the end of this report. Place a calendar notice in the Pleasant Pheasant. Send a 'save the date' email. See how to get on the GEC Council web-site.
<b>3 months</b>	<p>Event budget,</p> <p>Flyer at Roundtable with spoken announcement,</p> <p>US Mail a flyer to the each unit adult leader and committee chair.</p> <p>Add or activate a page at the GEC web-site,</p> <p>Article to your newsletter with a request for staff volunteers</p> <p>Include in your unit's monthly parent update letter/email.</p> <p>Visit the Troop and/or Pack meetings to build awareness directly to the youth participants.</p>

<b>2 months</b>	Re-edit your newsletter (unit, district or council) article with a request for registration  Phone unit leaders to solicit participation, request volunteers and give any last minute updates.
<b>5 weeks</b>	Registration site on-line
<b>3 to -2 weeks</b>	An email reminder
<b>Post event</b>	Send a follow-up article to the newsletter.

## Master Event Checklist

*Circle if planned and X when done*

- ☐ Form an event team.
- ☐ Schedule the event and your team meetings.
- ☐ Establish the theme.
- ☐ Write your master article once the event dates and content are known. See the sample at the end of this report.
- ☐ Prepare your flyer
- ☐ Start a unit or district web page with link to the flyer
- ☐ Begin multiple paths for promotion by:
  - ☐ Visit units
  - ☐ Present at Roundtable with flyer
  - ☐ US Mail your flyer and cover letter to leaders or parents in the unit(s)
- ☐ Prepare a press release
- ☐ Send your full master article with photos or graphics to the newsletter
- ☐ Send the press release to your local newspaper, for a public event
- ☐ Form an email list of units or people who should be involved.

- ☐ Send an early email notice to prospects.
- ☐ Send a follow-up email ten days before the event.
- ☐ Email an evaluation survey after the event to plan for next year.
- ☐ Prepare a follow-up article for the District newsletter.

## Start With A Flyer

Now we are down to the nuts and bolts. You have your event summary article, a plan and schedule along with a calendar notice already in your newsletter (unit, district or council). This is the time to prepare a flyer. One page, of course, but front and back are fine, too. Prepare it with Word or other word processor; Publisher is even better. Power Point will do but is less flexible.

Fill in the headlines with the event name, place and time. Pull the most important three paragraphs from your master article. Add some graphics from clip art or Google Images. If you have a webpage include a link with the full address. I typed in Cub Camp and got the graphic at the right.



You may print and photo copy from your master copy. If you plan to post it on-line or email it, convert to the PDF format. This format output is available in the more recent Word updates. I prefer Nitro PDF as it can do many added PDF support functions. It used to be about \$80 but they have bumped the price to \$120 as features are added. You might get an older copy on eBay for \$20. There are many other file conversion programs. Best to make the file name meaningful, something like "Cub\_Camp\_2016.pdf." Replacing blanks with underlines helps if this document will be posted on-line.

## Distribute Your Flyer Using Multiple Paths

A roof is supported by many columns. Just as with a roof, a promotional piece needs many paths to the proper reader. You can expect that one or more paths may fail. The printed flyer can be passed out in person as you visit Scouting units to promote your event. Mail it to all the families within your unit. Simply passing it out at a pack or troop meeting takes the very large chance it won't make the trip home. Sending the PDF version as an email attachment adds yet another path. If you do a unit or district webpage on your event upload your PDF file and link to it.



## Unit Presentations

Granted, visiting each unit takes time and people. But it will be the single greatest step toward building attendance. You meet face to face with Scouts, parents, and the unit leadership, pass out your flier and possibly hold a photo show. The ultimate would be to conduct an activity from your event for youth involvement. You can get a list of the units and their leadership as noted below.

## Newspapers

Your local newspapers are usually very Scout supportive as they know Scouting families are more likely to be their readers. You will always rate a Community Calendar entry. An interesting announcement article will may be printed. An engaging photograph will help. In the past a press release was expected on paper in a specific format. Go to Google and type: Press release template. Particularly, check in Google Docs.

These days you should file your article by email. It should include "Press Release" in the subject line, have a release date at the top and a complete first paragraph. The text may be in the body of the email or as an attached file using Word format only. The photograph should be in color in as high a resolution as possible and must be JPG format. Avoid the PDF format as extra labor is needed to restore lost formatting.

## Council Website Notice

As an example, the Golden Empire Council offers web-space to Districts. When you pull down the top tab District, on the left the active District pages are shown. Your event should have its own page, appear on the Yolo District Calendar and in What's News. Work through one of the webmasters shown in the Resources section to convert your master article into a web page.

Home
Yolo Camporee 2013
Yolo Web-O-Ree 2013
Recognition Dinner
Camp Cayuse 2013
District Leadership
Program & Events
What's News
Calendar
Merit Badges & Advancement

## Event Registration

A District level event may use the Council website for registration. The link will appear under Home, On-line Tools (at the left), Event Registration. Work with one of our designated webmasters to setup this registration process.

## After Your Event

Follow-up exposure is important after your event! Many people hear of an event and mentally say, “I’ll find how it went and go next year.” After-event publicity is particularly important if this is the first of an annual or periodic event. Write up your event in glowing terms, include quotes from happy participants, attach captioned photos and get as wide as possible distribution. This will definitely grow your attendance next time.

## Preparing Photographs

Photographs are the most read item on any publicity page. The reader scans them quickly, may glance at the captions, checks headlines and then decides the articles to read. An interesting photo supercharges your nearby article.



Hot Dogs Nourished The  
Troop 111 Dragon Patrol  
At Expo 2012.

Here is what the photo should have:

1. No snapshots, take the time to pose or frame so your photos to tell a story.
2. Faces should show either in profile or straight on. People are interested in people first and then their activity second. and surroundings last. Photos showing the backs of heads will immediately be discarded.
3. Label the photo to tie it to the article to assist the production process. Never send in “IMG0333.jpg” or “Boating.jpg.” Usually photos are separated from the text for processing and rejoined much later. Your caption could be “Troop 131 Cache Creek Tommy and Sam.jpg.” Just right click on the photo file name to rename it.

If you have photo editing capability set the resolution to 150 dpi and size to about 5 by 5 inches for newsletters. Send in your photo at full resolution for a newspaper. Attaching the photo to email or sending a link from the website DropBox.com is best. Embedding in an email will work but you can’t properly label the photo. Photos are separated from the text, processed, and then rejoin as the newsletter is produced. The photo caption must tie it clearly to the article.

Avoid sending a link to an on-site photo site like Picassa.com. You won’t be able to properly label, it is more work for the editor, and he probably will have to wade through many undesirable photos. You should choose the best photo, adjust resolution, label clearly, and then submit directly.

## Roadblocks

Let's admit it, we all work out of personal convenience. I've found the youth attendance at Scouting events is strongly affected by the willingness of adult leadership to attend. One troop has reported, "Our Scouts never do snow events." Year after year? That 'no snow' culture is being passed down through the adult leadership, not the Scouts. It simply isn't proper that individual Scouts are deprived of an experience due to the reluctance of adult leadership.

So how do you get around such roadblocks? 1) Give a presentation at a troop meeting, directly to the youth, showing photos of the prior year's event, 2) Present at a unit committee meeting so a broader cross-section of its families know of the opportunity. 3) If adult leadership lacks supportive skills (say rafting) then solicit another unit to have a joint event. 4) Likewise, if a unit is too small for a lock-in at Rocknasium team up with another troop. 5) Sometimes an older Scout may have undue influence in nixing an event due to his respect in the troop. It may be possible to form a smaller group of those that are willing.

## Resources and Distribution Paths

You will need to use a variety of resources and contact several people to setup your announcement distribution paths. Here is the current list of resources for the Yolo District. They may serve as good examples for your district.

- District Scouter List
- District Unit Leader List
- Posting on the Council Website
- Placing An Event Registration on the Council Website.
- Your District Newsletter

## Sample Event Article:

### **A Chill In The Air? Get Ready For The Klondike Derby**

It's beginning to look like the Klondike! Believe it or not, it's already time to start thinking about the Yolo District Klondike Derby. Reservations have been paid for, patches are being designed, and plans are being made!

Our 2013 Klondike Derby will be conducted on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, January 25, 26, and 27. The cost is \$15 per Scout or Scouter, including lunch Saturday and a patch. We'll be at the North Tahoe Regional Park just like last year. Go to our page on the Golden Empire Council website for all the details and to download the event guide.



Our program will cover first aid, ice floe recovery, fire building, and cache marking by lashings. Some unit will come for two nights of snow camping, one night or just as a day event. Please be in camp by 9:00 AM Saturday, January 26. The award ceremony will begin at 4:00 PM.

Packages will also be distributed at the October Roundtable into all Troops, Teams and Crews. Let's really talk this up with your units, and get those reservations made. Since we need to purchase supplies and pay for the camp reservation in advance, it's really important to get that information submitted quickly and accurately.

As always, we're looking for help and volunteers. Venturers, Varsity Scouts and senior Boy Scouts are wanted to serve as mayors for the various cities. All materials are provided – all you need to do is run it!

Dress warmly, stay dry, and see you in the snow! Joe, Governor of the Klondike.