

## Hints for Effective Programme Planning

Although nobody can plan your programme for you, since it all depends on the age, sex, and character of the people who are going to be involved in doing the activities, there are a few guidelines that you can follow to plan an effective programme which is fun, interesting, (dare we say it) educational, and most importantly is going to make people want to come to your Unit meetings.

The first key word is **variety**. Nobody will want to come to your Unit meetings if you do the same things every week. In the Programme Ideas Bank that we've compiled here, the ideas have been split into five categories: *Indoor Activities, Games, Outdoor Activities, Fund-raising Activities, and Social / Recruitment Activities*. Within these broad categories, the activities can be split down further. Try to ensure that you include programme items from each of the four main categories when planning your programme - putting a social event in once a term may take a little extra planning, but is great fun and will help to boost numbers in your Unit. As well as this, fund-raising may be a bit of a drag, but you can always try to make it fun, and remember - the more money you have in Unit funds, the more activities you can afford to do.

Key word number two is **preparation**. It doesn't matter how fun the programme item sounds on paper, if nobody can be bothered to prepare it, it will inevitably be a failure. Make sure that you don't have the same person organising events every week - share out the work load. If somebody is especially interested in a particular subject (e.g. pottery), ask them to organise an evening based around that subject. If the Programme Item is a large one (for example a social), ask two or three people to work together to organise it - for our annual Christmas Camp last year we formed a small committee to organise it, and it worked brilliantly (it keeps the leaders happy too - they don't have to do as much)! Remember: to fail to prepare is to prepare to fail.

The third key word is **budgeting**. There are two ways to look at this. Firstly, if you have too many expensive activities and you ask individual members to pay for themselves, they'll stop coming. Secondly, if you have too many expensive activities paid for by Unit funds, those funds start to disappear very rapidly. So find a happy medium - when you do an activity that requires an extra cost, ask Unit members to pay some of the cost (for example half), and subsidise the activity with funds from the Unit. The second solution is to make sure that you don't do too many activities which cost extra - Scouting should be for everybody, not just those who can afford it. If you do a lot of expensive activities, make sure you plan enough fund-raising events to cover the costs. Not only can these events be good fun, but they bring in much needed funds for the Unit.

Fourthly, remember to make your programme **interesting**. Different peoples ideas of what is interesting and what isn't vary immensely, but you can be sure that if you

spend too many Unit meetings train spotting, people will stop coming. The best way to ensure that your Programme appeals to *everyone* (and not just the Executive Committee) is to make sure that everybody has an input to it. Before Executive Committee meetings, ask Unit members to make suggestions about what they want to do at their meetings. Once you know what people want to do, you can start to effectively plan a programme. Try also to get everyone involved in organising events - if somebody suggests an activity, why not ask them if they wouldn't mind organising it. People are much happier organising events they enjoy doing, and as a result everybody else will have a better time as well!

Finally, make sure your programme is **innovating**. Too many Units seem to think they can recycle the same programme year after year. This doesn't work! As old people leave and new people join the Unit they will have different interests - move with the times, and make sure you have something in the Unit programme that appeals to everybody, not just those who have been there the longest. Don't be afraid to try something new. If it works, well done (and don't forget to tell us about it)! If it doesn't, never mind - you can learn from what went wrong, and fix the problems for the next time.

## Pyramid Programme Planning

Article taken from Scouting Magazine [April 1999: Volume 93: No. 4], written by Audrey Milan (content edited by website editor). Useful to think about when planning a Programme for any Section in the Group.

"What are we going to do tonight Akela?"

It's great to hear that excitement when the Cub Scouts greet you as you arrive for a Pack meeting. But if you are asking yourself that same question then there is probably a feeling of panic in the pit of your stomach. The same goes for the start of a Troop, Colony, or Unit meeting, of course. Programme planning makes the difference between sending members home still excited and hardly able to wait for next week, or bored, disillusioned and wondering whether it is worth coming back.

Programme planning is so crucial to achieving good Scouting that Sectional Assistant District Commissioners need to be ready to give a hand to any Leaders who find it difficult. One approach is to start with the simple overview called Pyramid Programme Planning (PPP). Let's start by looking at how this can be used to help you plan your own programme.

Start at the top of the pyramid with the long term planning - you will probably know the highlights of the District's year well in advance. Events such as St. Georges Day Parade, District Competitions or a visit of the Chief Scout to your County all give a start to your plan.

In the middle section, the medium term - Executive meetings and various Committee meetings will take up some time each month and all need to be planned into the programme. Many of these dates are largely determined by others. Also in this section go Group events (those which you already have a date for), such as the AGM, Scout's Owns, Group camps and things such as this.

The final level is for planning your individual Section meetings - these aren't just those that take place on the night you usually meet, but also any weekend activities, camps, etc. The further in advance you decide these dates, the more likely people are to be able to come. This final level in the pyramid is the level at which the game of Scouting is won or lost, where young people experience Scouting at its best, and make it their lifestyle, or find it boring and leave. You can make a difference.