

2023-03-13 – Recommendations for District Roundtable Improvements:

The following recommendations are based from the perspective of unit leaders attending the District meetings. These are largely based on the Placer District, but are also informed by one Pioneer Express District Roundtable meeting (see meeting notes after the recommendations). These recommendations are admittedly not based on any BSA or Commissioner trainings, but instead are based on what unit leaders have expressed they want/need, and items that would improve the Roundtables for us.

Action Items for District to improve Roundtables:

1. Survey the unit leaders that don't attend District meetings and ask them why they stopped coming, or what it would take to get them back. What would provide value to them as a leader? They aren't coming, but why? What would get them back. This would obtain valuable feedback, but could also engage and give ownership to unit leaders. Buy-in and ownership is huge.
2. Prioritize creating value for unit leaders. I'm calling this the '5150 rule': a majority, or 51% of time should be spent on something of value to the leaders. The remaining 50% can be spent on announcements and extracting value from unit leaders (planning camps, business activities, etc.). The total is over 100%, because scout leaders give over 100%. The extra 1% is similar to that "1 hour a week"- it's magic (and somewhat crazy). The district should devote and protect a significant portion of the Roundtable to create value for the attendees. Let the unit leaders determine their schedule of topics with examples like: discussion topics, craft ideas, sharing resources, creating resources together, etc. This doesn't have to be more work for District staff, but rather puts the ownership in the hands of the unit leaders (see action items for attendees below).
3. By prioritizing value for unit leaders, this will have to come at the expense of something. We propose that the District minimize time spent on announcements. Possibly collect announcement materials from leaders prior to the District meeting and post them to a website or as PDF that is easily linked by web address or QR code. The GEC board does this for their meetings, and in Placer District we are already quick to post the agendas and meeting materials to <https://placerscouting.org/resources/> so we could easily post a list of dates and announcements prior to the Roundtable. Also the Roundtable announcements are often out of order, so eventually all of the dates need to be put in order so they're organized. An example of chronologically ordered dates is from the January meeting notes: <https://placerscouting.org/media/JanuaryConnectionsNotes2023.pdf> If the dates and announcements are assembled prior to the meeting then leaders could then access the list by web link or scan a QR code at the meeting and bring up the announcements on their phone, then ask questions if they have any. The dates and announcement section of the meetings should be focused on any new items or changes, and the rest can be pointed to as a reminder in the interest of time.
4. After the District meeting the announcements should be shared with the District so all units can be informed (we are already doing this informally through Slack but we're not sure who knows about this. We can also drive people onto Slack for community building. Call it the water cooler effect of bringing people to one place for information where other conversations can occur).
5. Offer in-person position-specific training either before the main District meetings or during the breakout sessions. For example: spread out leader-specific training over 4 sessions so the leaders 1. get trained, and 2. check off their 4 Roundtables for their training award. Or coordinate a Red Cross CPR

and First Aid practical session (let people do the virtual course online, then come together before District for the hands-on session).

6. Host a monthly or bi-monthly zoom Roundtable for the entire Council, and leaders can pop into the Cub or BSA breakout room and chat with other leaders. The problems unit leaders are facing are not unique, and we may have better numbers or “critical mass” at a Council level for Roundtables. Virtual may be a real advantage here, but there may be opposition to this (at the PEX meeting they mentioned that when a unit leader has a question they should ask their commissioner, who should ask the district staff, who should ask the council staff – and once the question is answered it should filter through all of the same layers so that everyone learns from it. So grassroots sharing of information and resources on a leader-to-leader basis would decrease the reliance on commissioners and the need for hierarchy. But there aren’t enough commissioners in either district, so maybe this would be welcome?)

7. Bottom line: to get unit leaders back we need to create value through actual Roundtables with human connections, shared information and resources, and meetings that benefit attendees. Occasional planning sessions for Twilight or Camporees are understandable, but should not overtake the value proposition for attendees, otherwise attendees will be lost.

Action Items for Unit Leaders Participating in District Roundtables:

1. Provide feedback to District leadership on topics that appeal to Unit leaders.
2. Create a list of discussion topics and activities for District Roundtable breakouts. These items should be valuable to the Unit key 3, but also should be appealing for other leaders (Committee, ASM, ACM, DLs, etc. - as to improve attendance through genuine interest in discussion topics).
3. Work with the Roundtable Commissioners to create a breakout schedule for the year.
4. Defend the breakout time and aspects that are valuable to unit leaders from encroachment.
5. Actively recruit other Unit leaders to attend the Roundtables (both within a home Unit, and in the surrounding Units).

Potential Cub Leader Breakout Topics:

1. Making neckerchief slides – or other crafting ideas – with hands on craft and examples.
2. District Storage: what shared resources are available to unit leaders (inventory review, setup and play with air rockets, etc.)
3. Shared efforts: how can we spread the load between units and minimize duplicated efforts
4. Building resources: what can we build together that is bigger than our individual units? Push carts, recruitment resources, shared plans, campouts, etc.

20230209 – Pioneer Express District Roundtable Notes

On 2/9 we attended the Pioneer Express District Roundtable. The reason for attending was to see how they run their meetings and provide value to their leaders.

Observations:

Attendance was higher than Placer District with about 6 District leaders (silver loops), one cub leader, and maybe 16 Scouts BSA unit leaders in attendance.

Like Placer, PEX did not have Roundtable breakouts. This was rationalized due to poor Cub leader attendance. Similar to Placer the single biggest use of time was calendar / announcements. They also do not have a mechanism to relay what was discussed at the District meeting to Unit leaders not in attendance.

Wally Payne led the meeting and we spoke with him afterwards. He said that 80% of their attendees are Scouts BSA, and they have very low engagement with Cub leaders. He said Cubs are different and the reason for more Scouts BSA leaders was likely because they tend to stick around longer, whereas the Cub leaders fairly quickly move onto Scouts BSA (despite being new to scouts and possibly needing the most help).

Extrapolating from these two Districts, we assume that most Districts in the GEC operate similarly. Every District likely sends a representative to some Council meeting and receives word-of-mouth announcements. Those announcements are then added to District-specific content and further info scraped from the GEC website, then this package of info is read aloud to the Unit leaders at the District meetings.

Every district is duplicating the effort of repeating the dates and events to their members, and the time adds up.

Another huge problem is that essential information does not get distributed to Unit leaders not in attendance. For example, if Placer District has 17 Cub units on the roster, but only 6 show up to a meeting (typically 37, 1533, 507, 12, 112, 1592) that's only a 1/3rd of Packs receiving the information. The attendance numbers for Scouts BSA units are far worse, so the Troops in Placer are even less informed.

A simple solution to both of these issues is to share an online list of dates and events through an updated email list and reallocate the time spent on announcements for Roundtable discussions/breakouts or other material that provides value to Unit leaders. Or rather than email, push the information out through an online forum like the Slack group to get people checking in with a forum where they can also ask questions and interact with other leaders.

I'm not sure if the Districts are intentionally withholding the dates and information only for in-person attendees, or if this is done by accident. If this is intentional then I believe that we can't hold the dates and announcements hostage in attempt to drive in-person attendance to District meetings. The dates are valuable, but obviously not valuable enough to get all units in attendance. We need to provide value to attendees by having real connections with other leaders through roundtable discussions or through providing resources to decrease workload for unit leaders.

At PEX it was proposed that one person from each unit to subscribe for the GEC calendar and events, and let that person rifle through the emails it generates to relay relevant info back to the unit. The new GEC calendar allows filtering the events for “Cub Scout”, but when we experimented with this it still includes all of the different district meetings, planning meetings, and any items that broadly include the keywords “cub scout”. So subscription to the new GEC calendar system does not significantly improve the communication issue.

Additionally the GEC newsletter or website are great, but should not be used as a substitute for targeted communications that are tailored for certain leaders/units (ie, Cub-specific, BSA-specific, etc.). The communication from Council is like a firehose of content and takes some experience to navigate it efficiently. (Update: the March GEC Newsletter was less dense than prior emails, and has less information than the firehose newsletters from Michelle). For example, every quarter I whittle down all of the dates and make quarter sheet calendars to hand out to parents so they can do their calendaring at home. The dates are only the events relevant to our pack families, so they’re not overloaded or searching for the information.