



Jumpstart to GROWTH

Retaining and Recruiting Youth

Plan for Growth

Industrious people know that growth isn't something to be left to chance. It requires forethought, planning and commitment to carry out a strategy. In Scouting growth happens when year-to-year youth retention is high and there are good youth recruitment practices in place. This Jump Start to Growth is a simple-to-follow collection of best practices to help Scout Groups recruit and retain youth to Scouting Sections. Many of the resources listed can be easily implemented and adapted to suit local needs.

Youth Recruitment Team

Establishing and empowering a Youth Recruitment Team (YRT) is the first step in growing Scouting. Every Scout Group should have a bold membership target and this team of leaders, parents and Scout Group Committee members will be responsible for creating and carrying activities that will achieve this goal. To aid in your planning download the easy-to-use "[Growth Plan](#)" template.

RETAINING YOUTH

September is a busy month for families, ensuring Scouting remains in their plans shouldn't be left to chance. Structured planning, open communications, and fun activities are some of the ways to keep members coming back. Here are some simple strategies to follow.

STRUCTURED PLANNING

Youth-Driven Program Planning

One way to ensure youth look forward to returning to the program in the fall is to involve them in the program planning for the up-coming season. Hosting a planning meeting late in the spring or summer is a great way to bring them back one more time. Involving them in the program plan provides them with "ownership" and this will help ensure they look forward to the upcoming year. It doesn't need to be too detailed but the highlights need to be there.

Have a Year-At-A-Glance Program Outline

Sections should be planning out the following year and be prepared to share that with youth and parents when reinitiating contact for the oncoming year. Using the "[Year-At-A-Glance Program Plan](#)" template will help communicate key messages to parents. This easy-to-use template enables Sections to briefly highlight program emphasis and special events in a dynamic layout which can be used for both retention and recruitment purposes.

OPEN COMMUNICATIONS

Scout Group Newsletter

Establishing a Scout Group Newsletter is a fantastic way to maintain communication between the Scout Group, the youth and their families. It provides an opportunity to celebrate accomplishments and relive a memory from "last month's camp." It also provides an opportunity to provide a glimpse of the fun and adventurous things to come. Get started by downloading the "[It Starts with Scouts Group Newsletter](#)" template. The more the family feels involved, the more likely they return. The It Starts with Scouts Group Newsletter helps achieve this.

Easy-to-use and inexpensive desktop publishing software can help you express the Group's creativity. Recruiting someone to be a journalist, editor and publisher of a regular newsletter should be relatively easy.

Invite Them Back

Reaching out to youth will help motivate them to come back.

Some key messages that should be delivered are:

- Program highlights for the year
- Badges they are going to earn
- What's new for the coming year
- First meeting and important dates

Some ideas on how to reconnect are:

- **The Call Back Blitz** – Receiving a phone call inviting youth to the first meeting of the new year can make them feel important. They should also feel that the Scout Group/Section would not be the same without them.
- **The Welcome Back Postcard** – Everyone likes to receive mail — especially kids, and they get excited about an invitation. Sending postcards to each individual helps make them feel important. Upon receiving the postcard, they should feel that they'd be missing out on something if they didn't rejoin. They should also feel that the Scout Group/Section would not be the same without them.
- **The Bring-Them-Back Letter** – It's nice to know that you have been missed and contacting members who haven't been around for a couple of years might encourage them to check out what they've been missing. They should be made to feel that the Scout Group/Section just wasn't the same without them.

FUN ACTIVITIES

Host a Scout Group-Wide Kick-Off Campfire and Weiner Roast

Bringing members and their families together for a Campfire and Weiner Roast late in the summer is a great way to build that new Scouting year connection. Book a site at your local Scout camp, park or conservation area. Keep away from the weekends and encourage the whole family to come out.

Host "The Best Welcome Back Party Ever"

This party is strictly for returning members and ideally held just before the Labour Day Weekend. The party could take place in the form of an offsite-visit to a place of interest, a special event or a recreational facility. If your Section or Scout Group has a year-end event, consider shifting this expense to be the start-up event.

Here are some ideas for party venues:

- The local park for a campfire
- A Scout camp for a specific program activity
- A water park
- Mini golf
- Swimming pool
- Climbing wall
- Bowling
- Archery club
- Professional or (semi-pro) sporting event
- Zoo
- Marine park
- A science exhibit/museum
- Scouter Jim's for his famous hamburgers

Linking Activities

Gradually exposing a Section's older youth to the next senior Section is critically important when encouraging youth to move through the Scouting program. For many youth, a sudden change in their routine can create enough anxiety to discourage this transition. Scout Groups should encourage and support "linking activities" between the Sections so that curiosities are piqued and a sense of comfort is established. Linking activities should also include family members, as they too may be feeling much the same about the change. There are a great number of linking ideas listed in the various Leader Handbooks. Don't forget to include "Kims" and "Keeos" within the leadership teams!

For more ideas check out the article ["Summer Programs and the Impact on Retention"](#).

RECRUITING YOUTH

While recruiting youth to the program is a year-round activity, the critical mass of the membership comes from activities that take place in August, September and October.

Understanding how your audience consumes information is important. Thinking about where youth “hang out” is likely the best place to start in determining what recruitment methods you should utilize.

Here are just a few places to consider:

- School
- Mall/retail outlets/big box stores
- Home
- Friend’s house
- Community centre/arena
- Library
- Cultural/religious institutions
- Clubs
- Parks/conservation areas

Another consideration is the younger the youth, the more involved the parents are in deciding activities for their child(ren). Understanding where the parents can be accessed is extremely important in helping to determine what recruitment methods should be utilized.

Here are just a few places to consider:

- Work
- Home
- Cultural/religious institutions
- Special events at schools
- Parks/conservation areas
- Mall/retail outlets/big box stores
- Festival/exhibition events
- Community centre
- Internet – Facebook, Twitter and online communities and activity listings

Recruiting is best accomplished when the Scouting message is placed in front of a potential member and their parents.

Here are some ideas to help:

Host an Open House Event

A Scouting Open House has proven to be a very effective tool in the promotion of Scouts Canada programs in the community. It is so effective that there is a separate [“Jumpstart to Growth”](#).

Bring-a-Friend Events

A good way to have more youth and adults explore the benefits of Scouting is to host a Bring-a-Friend Event. The objective of an event is to grow membership by using existing Scouting members as ambassadors. A Bring-a-Friend Event is exactly what the name eludes to — a special event to which Scouting youth invite one or more friends. The event is designed to highlight activities and experiences unique to Scouting. This growth activity is supported by a separate [“Jumpstart to Growth”](#).

Set Up Information Booths

Setting up an information booth at a local event or gathering place is a good way to connect with parents and youth and is also a way to meet other people in the community who may be of great benefit to the Scout Group. A good example is to set up a refreshment and information table at the school’s Meet the Teacher Night. Almost every school has an event where parents come out to meet the teacher or learn about the curriculum. Contact the principal and offer to host a coffee table at the front doors of the school and offer parents refreshments as they enter. Invite them to drop by on the way out if they would like to know more about Scouting in the neighbourhood.

Scouts Canada Display Booth at the Local Mall, Fair, Festival, Event

Scouts traditionally do a mall display during Scout Week in February but having one in late August and early September could help boost membership. Many malls have a designated kiosk especially for this sort of activity. Often there is a lot of competition for people's attention at a mall and most will not be going to the mall to seek Scouting out. Your Council has access to a number of resources to help you with many types of displays and information booths. It never hurts to ask how they could help.

Here are some ideas to make your booth stand out and be effective:

- The booth must reflect Scouts Canada's current branding and be stocked with sufficient resource materials. You should also know how to pitch Scouting to youth and potential volunteers.
- Invite existing Scouting youth and dynamic personalities who can quickly engage youth and parents alike.
- Make the booth interactive. Planning an activity to engage the youth is a good way to attract them to the booth. It also keeps the youth busy while a conversation with the parent can occur. For example create a prize wheel that people can spin for a Scout pencil, tattoo, ruler or other such collateral.
- If allowed by mall management, hand out freshly made Scout Popcorn or an apple. Please ensure that local health department guidelines are followed.
- Provide a free meeting certificate to come and try out a meeting. [Download the template.](#)
- And don't forget to take this opportunity to recruit great volunteers!

Distribute a Scouts Canada Flyer

A flyer is a quick and inexpensive way to get the attention of youth and parents. There are a number of marketing resources accessible at the "[Scouts Canada Brand Centre](#)" and can be customized to suit your local needs. Here are some ideas on how to use the Scouts Canada Flyer:

- **School Flyer** – First get permission from the appropriate School Board level and then drop flyers off at the school for distribution to students. It is extremely important to follow-up with the school principal and/or secretary to encourage distribution. In most schools, the principal decides when the flyers will be sent home. Ideally, these flyers need to get to families within the first week of school. Sometimes a well-placed package of Scout Popcorn to say thank you helps get the flyers distributed in a timely manner! For a nominal fee a bulk supply of School Flyer blanks can be ordered which can be customized and printed locally. You can find this on the "[Scouts Canada Brand Centre](#)".
- **Grocery Bag Flyer Blitz** – A good relationship with a local shopkeeper could open up a range of possibilities, including having a Scouts Canada flyer given to each customer at the checkout counter or posting on a community board. Check with the store manager to see if it is possible.
- **Neighbourhood Flyer Blitz** – Utilizing existing members to deliver flyers in any given neighbourhood is very quick and effective. Turning it into a competition, scavenger hunt or hike can make it fun and program friendly. Rewarding the teams with hot chocolate and some donut holes is a good way to cap off the event.
- **Flyer Insert into Bulletins** – Many religious institutions and organizations have regular bulletins. Bulletins are read by parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles and one should never underestimate how placing a simple flyer can trigger a positive reaction. Enlist the help of the parents to identify such opportunities and providing them enough flyers to do the job makes for light work. If including a flyer is not possible you may still be able to include a mention in the regular bulletin.

Posters

Scouts Canada's newest series of posters are rich with visuals that relate to youth and parents. Scout Groups can access and adapt these [posters](#). Careful consideration should be made when determining location and timing. A bright new poster appearing at just the right time can significantly increase the chance it gets noticed. With the number of different posters available, it has become very easy to change posters on a regular basis. Consider the list of hang-outs of both parents and youth and seek permission to post one up in those locations. Many stores, libraries, community centres and religious institutions have designated bulletin boards for such promotion. Check in with the local manager to see what approval is needed to hang a poster. The Scouts Canada posters allow for customized local information to be added. This is a good place to add a short message on who to contact and/or advertise an upcoming Open House or Registration Event.

Media and Advertising

Effective marketing no longer means spending thousands on an ad campaign. It means efficiently utilizing all available media to reach your potential customers. Think about advertising within local newspapers, TV and radio stations. Reach out to these outlets to see if they have some ad space or airtime available and if they are interested in running a Scouts Canada ad. Scouts Canada has a number of ["Ads and PSAs"](#) already produced that can be used as is or modified for local use.

Social Media

Another great means of connecting with the target market is to get their attention on social networking sites. For instance, set up a Facebook group and post information on the New Scouting Group or use Twitter to post updates and upcoming activities. An email blast can be sent out to area contacts informing them of the Group existence.

Teacher Endorsements/Referrals

Ensuring teachers have the most up-to-date information on Scouting in the community may prove to be beneficial as they reach out to parents and youth who are looking to further enrich the education of young people. Providing a few Scouts Canada program flyers and a local Scout Group flyer may net some referrals. Getting a list of teachers and preparing each of them an information package shouldn't prove that difficult. Be sure to enclose the ["How Scouting Enriches Learning at School and at Home"](#). Don't feel limited to teachers.

There are a great number of professionals who have referral influence on youth and families and providing them with the same information may help to recruit a few more members.

Word of Mouth

Word of mouth is the most important form of marketing that you can have. Traditionally, it meant the passing of information from person to person verbally. Now, it includes all types of media from the spoken to the written word. One person with a YouTube video or blog can reach millions of people. And remember to help ensure positive word of mouth is to make sure that every person who comes in contact with Scouts Canada experiences superior customer service.