



MCS 315

Effective Unit Service in Rural Communities

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| Time allotted | 50 minutes |
| Teaching format | Instructor-led discussions with PowerPoint support & Activity |

Resources

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| Handouts | <ul style="list-style-type: none">MCS 315 – Lone Scout FAQ– 1 per person |
| Equipment and materials | <ul style="list-style-type: none">MCS 315 – Effective Unit Service in Rural Communities course planMCS 315 – Effective Unit Service in Rural Communities PowerPoint presentationWhite Board / Chalkboard / Poster Post-It note |
| Resources for additional participant learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none">The Lone Scout PlanLone Scout Friend and Counselor Guidebook |

Course Connections

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| Connections to other CCS courses | |
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Presentation Outline

Course / Learning Objectives – 3 minutes

In this course, the participants will learn about the characteristics of a rural community and how to work with a rural community to maintain an effective unit. While this course discusses rural and small towns in general, there are useful tips for every commissioner when developing relationships in the community they serve whether rural, urban or suburb.

Introduce the learning objectives, noting that by the end of this session, each participant should be able to:

- **Understand** the opportunities and challenges of working with rural units.
- **Learn** methods for recruiting leaders and Scouts in rural and distant communities.
- **Receive and share** methods to reduce the cost of Scouting.
- **Capture** methods for providing Scouting in small units.

Introduction – Rural Communities – The Heartland

Ask: What is the definition of a rural community?

Provide the definition of rural: open land that has few homes and not many people. The population density is low. Often large ranch or farm acreage is interspersed with homes and outbuildings.

Ask: What are some characteristics of a rural community. After collecting their ideas, summarize on a white/chalk/virtual board and compare the participant's answers.

For virtual presentation, when leading a discussion, consider whether to (a) allow participants to just speak up, (b) ask participants to post their responses in the chat line for the facilitator to read aloud, (c) ask participants to raise their hands for the instructor or facilitator to call on, or (d) choose a combination of these options.

Many virtual-presentation platforms have a whiteboard available. Alternatively, notes can be taken on a PowerPoint slide in editor mode.

Read the following quote from Lord Baden-Powell and point out that rural communities are different from urban communities and that every rural community is going to be a bit different.
“...what suits one particular troop or one kind of boy, in one kind of place, will not suit another within a mile of it, much less those scattered over the world and existing under totally different conditions.

Discuss that rural communities are different than urban ones and have their challenges and opportunities for Scouting.

- Rural communities provide a firm Scouting heritage by espousing the ideals of the Scout Oath and Law. Often youth are influenced by their parents who embrace Scouting and other community leaders who do the same. By being flexible and adaptable, Scouting programs serving rural communities are influential in making youth successful leaders.
- Tailoring Scouting to rural areas is a part of our Scouting heritage as mentioned in the Baden-Powell quote.

Opportunities and Challenges working with Rural Units – 5 minutes

A Different Approach

It takes time and commitment to earn trust in rural communities. The lifeblood of rural communities is to be respectful and trustworthy. Volunteerism runs deep and demonstrably delivering on what is said is critical to garnering respect as a trusted member of the community. Always do what you say as your word is your bond! It will take **time and dedication** to build the trust with the community leaders.

People who live in rural areas are self-sufficient, know others in the community, and regularly help each other. The local community often has a leader or group of leaders who are the

arbiters of all activity within their community. New and existing commissioners need to work in concert with the local leader or leaders and make certain Scouting activities are coordinated with those leaders as well.

These folks are busy, often holding multiple jobs and volunteer positions. Agriculture requires long hours and employs the whole family. Children may travel long distances (time) to go to school. Members of the community participate in many activities and events (school, community, religious, sports). They may not have a large amount of time to spend on Scouting.

People Considerations:

- **Be aware of Scouter's life events** - Be aware of and responsive to weddings, funerals, hospitalizations, and other events important in the lives of unit Scouters. Be familiar with key events in the life of the organization that is chartered to operate the unit.
- **Respect the community's cultures and lifestyles** - Remember, each is a unique person with his or her own special character and is conditioned by his or her own life's experiences and background.

Recruiting Leaders and Scouts in Rural Communities – 20 minutes

Finding the Right leaders

Use caution when recruiting and know timing is everything. Going too fast may end up slowing you down.

- **Focus on serving youth in the community** - Showing interest in the community demonstrates your investment in the youth and builds the relationships needed for future interactions.
- **Locate previous Scouters** to talk to. If you know a Scouter who grew up or lived in that community, bring them along as the spokesperson. Their presence will increase the trust and respect your message receives since they know what it is like to live in their community.
- **Talking face to face** is usually preferred in rural communities, but ask those you're building a relationship with how they prefer to be contacted. There may also be a possibility of lack good phone, cell, and internet service in more remote communities.
- **Take time to learn community history, cultures, volunteer associations.** Get to know the local culture and unique situations in the community. Each community has its own character and culture. Learn the culture and keep it in mind when making suggestions.
- **Get to know community members** - A commissioner from outside the community needs to get to know the community by being humble and fulfilling the commitments made while interacting and chatting with the community.
 - Visit local clubs to gain an understanding and a feel of diversity in the community.

- Visit fire and police departments - Volunteer Fire Departments usually meet to conduct business meetings. Consider finding out the schedule of the business meetings and making introductions.
- Visit schools - get to know those leaders as they can be a great resource for community connections, and potential Scout volunteers. They have a great insight into local hierarchy and influencers.

Attending local events outside of Scouting and conduct outreach activities like volunteering at local churches, schools, fire stations, and police benefits helps develop relationship withing the community. Often the leaders of the community will be at those locations and being visible helps future interactions.

- Bringing food or snacks to an event is a good way to demonstrate your investment in the community.
- Attending grade school or middle school sporting events shows you are interested in the youth and understand they do more than Scouting.

Other ideas?

Communication

- **Be a people person** - Many people lack confidence in doing something new and fear failure. You can help volunteers increase their self-confidence. Spread the can-do spirit!
- **Listen to the leaders and parents in units** - What are their interests, needs, resources, and backgrounds? How can they be reached? Who do they know? What groups do they belong to? Don't sell Scouting so hard you aren't listening to what unit people are saying. Watch and listen to the unit in action, but with no suggestion of snooping or prying. Remember "silent" and "listen" contain the same letters.
 - **Active listening** takes some practice; here are some ideas: Give your full attention, use body language, avoid interruptions, don't fear silence, reflect and summarize what you heard with a positive spin, validate feelings, ask thoughtful questions, avoid judgement or offering advice.
- **Empathize** - Always try to understand how things look and feel to the other person. Empathy is the ability to put yourself in the other person's shoes—viewing a situation or idea through their "filter." Empathy can be one of the most valuable and powerful qualities you can develop to strengthen your relationship, your communications, and the ability to get things done through other people.
- **Be responsive and timely** to unit leaders needs and circumstances. Don't put the wants and needs of the district ahead of the wants and needs of the unit. You are an advocate of the unit and a helper of unit people. "Think units!" Be responsive also to the chartered organization, its needs and circumstances, and the relationship to its units. If you make a promise, keep it! Also, make certain, if you don't know an answer to a question, admit it and find that answer.
- **Encourage, be positive** - Your attitude toward unit people is more important than any information you have to share. Be prepared to spend more time with those units that

need the most help. Visit more than once a month. With a new or reorganized unit, make some kind of weekly contact until the unit has “taken root.”

- **Provide immediate recognition** - Say, “Well done!” Write a note. Make a phone call or present a small award. Material awards are more effective than abstract recognition. If you see they are doing something well, tell them before leaving. Be specific about what they did well. It will build their confidence and make them feel good. It will also show you are paying attention to their efforts.

Resolving Issues

Stay neutral and impartial when the unit leaders share their past conversations with you. Counsel unit people in a way that protects their pride and provides solutions that fit their unit and their community situation.

Make yourself available and helpful - Keep your help more person-oriented than thing-oriented. Your job is helping people. Often making your availability to help known is enough to forge bonds of trust.

Be adaptable - You may need to help leaders understand that youth can benefit from Scouting even though parent participation, the unit committee, and help from the chartered organization are limited or absent. Some unit leaders try to cope alone with their special needs and problems. Volunteer frustration soon sets in if nothing in the district is tailored to their individualized needs.

Think of alternative approaches, not single solutions. We can be bound together in Scouting fellowship even though we use somewhat different methods to meet different situations. For example, the BSA has a great variety of program material available to help unit leaders succeed—to help fulfill kids’ Scouting dreams. Flexibility is the key — reach the same ends, but by different means. Different approaches can have the same impact on the lives of different kids.

Keep your target on the ‘big picture’ - The work of unit people is made up of many things and many problems. Don’t get so blinded by applying a bandage that you miss the broken arm or missing limb. Be aware of problems expressed by unit people as well as problems they do not know they have. Review units in-depth with the unit Key 3.

For each unit:

- Look at the total condition of the unit.
- What is the priority need for help?
- What individual service efforts can we provide in the next 30 days?
- Who will make it happen and how?

This helps focus time and effort on the total picture of individual units rather than on a number of categorical checklists for the district. This assures a constant updating of individual needs and service plans to meet needs.

When working with units utilize EDGE training - Remember **Explain, Demonstrate, Guide, Enable**. Be sure both the “explain” and “demonstrate” are related to the unit’s environment and lifestyle. Examples that they can look at allows them to decide how they would do it themselves. Link your coaching to what unit people are presently doing in their units.

Reducing the Cost of Scouting– 5 minutes

Costs may be an issue for rural communities - It is not uncommon for many rural areas to have less monetary income than the nearby urban areas. Because of this the cost of Scouting can be an issue. There are many ways to reduce the cost of Scouting.

Reduce costs by:

- **Sharing resources** within the unit by passing uniforms to other Scouts. Obtaining uniforms from previous or older Scouts reduces the costs of uniforms. The unit can set up a clothing exchange where new Scouts can look for a uniform. When the Scout leaves, the uniform can be returned for the next Scout. Shared books with separate records. Have the unit own the books; they are loaned to the Scouts for use. The records are then kept in an advancement form or in an electronic record.
- **Unit printed T-shirts** rather than official uniform. This is allowable for any unit. Make sure each Scout uses the same t-shirt, we don’t want a mixture of t-shirts and uniforms. Unit Neckerchiefs are another great idea to conserve cost.
- **Multiple units combining for activities** - Having multiple units combine in activities can fun for the youth as they are part of a larger group and allows for ride sharing when long distances are traveled such as going to summer resident camp or high adventure activities.
- **Camperships / Scholarships** - Each council will have camperships to pay a portion of the cost of attending day and resident camps. These require an application to the council and a demonstration of need. Scholarships for registration fees are also available in each council. Again, these typically provide only a portion of the costs which ensures buy-in from the Scout and parents.
- **Remote meetings / Virtual / Hybrid** - Consider meeting options, in person vs. calling in via a smart device to save some travel time. Challenges occur with virtual meetings, so keep the tempo and interactions lively to keep remote attendees engaged. Hybrid meetings are a mixture of some Scouts meeting face to face and others online.

Small Rural Unit Scouting Options –15 minutes (including 10-minute activity)

Present a variety of refinements for adapting Scouting to sparsely populated rural areas. Discuss the various ways to work with small units and to make Scouting fun for the youth.

Den aide or denner instead of den chiefs - In rural units there may not be a Scouts BSA troop nearby to provide den chiefs. In this case any parent can be a den aide and provide support for the den leader. It can also be an older brother or sister who assists. Remember to

maintain two deep leadership during all activities. A denner is a Cub Scout youth who is given additional responsibilities during the den meeting. This is a leadership position that is used to help the den leaders and the other Scouts. The position can be earned by the Scout or rotated through the den members. Each Scout should have an opportunity to be the denner. The responsibilities of the denner should be appropriate for the age and abilities of the youth. Some possible responsibilities of the denner are:

- Lead the gathering activity.
- Lead the flag ceremony, closing with the Pledge of Allegiance.
- Helps with handing out supplies for the activities.
- Lead the game played during the meeting.
- In a multi-aged den can help younger Scouts with tasks.

Multi-aged Dens - In rural communities there may not be enough youth at an age level to make a full den. There also may not be enough parents to be the den leader. Combining the den meetings for several age groups can make the meetings more fun for the Scouts and allow only two adults to serve several age levels. Tiger, Wolf and Bear Scouts can be combined or Bear and Webelos and Arrow of Light levels can be combined. Many of the activities are repeated each year.—Although the youth may be working in the same area, try to have them work on the project appropriate for their level.

Lone Cub Scouts / Scouts BSA - *Hand out the Lone Scout FAQs and pass around the Lone Scout Friend and Counselor Guidebook for the participants to look at.*

The Lone Cub Scout and Lone Scouts BSA program is provided for specific cases where it is not reasonable for the youth to be part of a unit. There are specific requirements for a youth to be eligible. Each lone Scout has to have an adult who will assist and supervise them while working on Scout activities. Typically, it is a parent but can also be another family member or someone in the community. If the adult is not a member of the family two deep leadership must be maintained. With the lone Scout plan there are certain advantages to this experience. For example, Scouting activities can be done entirely at home. Boys or girls who live in rural areas have the outdoors close at hand where much of Scouting takes place. Each youth can progress at his or her own pace, building upon his or her achievements.

<https://www.scouting.org/commissioners/lone-scout/>

Wagon-wheel troops, weekly patrol meetings, monthly troop meetings - There are many options for meeting schedules, times, and dates. Extended Saturday or Sunday meetings which includes an outdoor activity, community Good Turn, or family activity are useful in some rural areas. Wagon wheel troops may decide to meet at each spoke (patrol location, often a different town) weekly, then monthly meet at the hub (central location more or less equally distant from each patrol).

Technology options: virtual meetings, social media, shared drives - Consider using social media to conduct meetings remotely. This will save some travel time and is handy during times of inclement weather. Nothing replaces that face-to-face contact among youth and adults, but this is an option for units.

Multi-unit activities such as campouts and “go see its”. This allows for the Scouts to have more fun by being with a larger group and allows for ride sharing and makes obtaining two deep leadership easier.

Learning Check Scenario Review – 10 minutes:

Notes: Instructor-led Activity

Review this Scenario and discuss as a class.

Janet is the new unit commissioner for Firestart Council covering Faye county. None of the other commissioners are in Faye county where 3 units are chartered. Janet has 3 years of experience as a unit commissioner, and recently relocated with her family to start a new job at Acme. Janet has 2 older children; both have had the Scouting experience.

Faye county is sparsely populated but has 3 key employers that many residents work for: Acme auto parts, a manufacturing facility; The Refugee and Immigrant Center, temporary home to 500 families and Holy Divinity Bible College, a renowned theological school with 2000 students enrolled, though half are online. There is also a large retirement community in the county.

- Janet has some key contacts at Acme, but needs a way to connect to the other big employers and community.
- What are some strategies Janet can take to engage existing units and potentially expand Scouting in Faye County?

Instructor: Write brainstorming ideas on the board, get inputs from all students. Fine tune a strategy with multiple options.

- Look for connections across Acme, Refugee / Immigrant Center and Holy Divinity.
- Open house at the college; connect with instructors, staff, administration?
- Any community celebrations?
- Culture exchange opportunities?
- Church connections to the college?
- Retiree's as potential volunteers?
- Other ideas

For virtual presentation, consider the options for how to lead a discussion described on page 2 of this Course Plan.

Summary/Conclusion – 1 minute

- Get to know the community and residents before you make changes.
- Build relationships and find leaders to have a successful Scouting program.
- Spend time, build community trust - demonstrate your commitment to the program.
- Recognize leaders, parents, volunteers.
- Economize where possible.
- Be flexible as you build relationships and grow units.

Questions? – 1 minute