

Involvement Step by Step

Getting new parents to participate means finding out where they are on the involvement ladder, then creating opportunities that match.

One of the fundamental strengths of a well-run parent group is the ability to identify just where parents are in terms of involvement and to reach out to those parents accordingly.

I call it the *Parent Involvement Ladder*, and the basic idea is that treating all parents the same way is a recipe for involvement frustration. For parents who have never volunteered or perhaps never even attended a scouting event, your “Meeting next Tuesday at 7 p.m.” flyer is unlikely to get them off the couch and skipping into your meeting. Your goal with currently uninvolved parents is to simply get them to attend an event.

In other words: If you’re throwing a spaghetti supper, you’d like them to eat pasta. That’s it. If they come to event and chow down, you’ve made strides in involvement. That’s a win. Parents have taken a step onto the first rung of the involvement ladder.

At Committee Meetings, you might want to talk about these first steps. Our Scout Awards Nights and our volunteer driver/camper program are both aimed squarely at turning the uninvolved into the somewhat involved.

But the real focus of this column is what then? While great family events with tons of kids and parents and leaders interacting positively at scout event are wonderful, we also want to move folks up the ladder. We’d like those spaghetti eaters to become occasional spaghetti cooks. Or occasional website helpers. Or occasional campout volunteers and future leaders.

And we’d really like some of those occasional volunteers to eventually move up to leadership slots, perhaps helping lead the spaghetti supper committee or—egad!—maybe even taking over your elected spot someday.

This mid-fall time frame is the perfect time to think about just how your group plans to move folks up the ladder. Hopefully, you’ve already held one or two open family events or you have them on the calendar and are moving toward success. Now you need to put some good habits in place for taking the best advantage of those events.

The first step is making sure your family events are welcoming and fun. Sounds basic, but you shouldn’t underemphasize it. Parents will be much more open to connecting with your group if it gains a well-earned reputation for openness and spirit. Your events are the first impression many parents will have of your group.

The next steps are a bit more specific. Do you actively try to team a new volunteer with a veteran volunteer for most of your committee jobs? While it’s often easiest to let two pals (especially if they’re both vets) run with an event or program, making an effort to pair new volunteers with experienced helpers can make a big difference.

It creates natural, safe slots for new members to step into, and it serves as a ready-made training ground for future leaders.

And where do you find these new volunteers? Among the pasta eaters, of course. That’s the next tip: Assign someone to keep track (formally or informally) of which moms and dads are attending your family events. Those that come out a few times and have a good time are your best prospects for new volunteers. When you

need help, reach out to a few of those moms and dads personally with a very specific message and request. “So glad you’ve been able to make it out. Wondering if you might be able to help with the cleanup committee (or the ticket-takers, etc.) at XYZ event next month?”

Similarly, those parents who start helping out on a semi-regular basis become great prospects for leadership positions next year. Identifying some of those potential leaders now, personally connecting with them, and easing them up these important next rungs is far more effective than waiting until April and placing a general “We need new leaders” plea in your newsletter.

Long-term success comes from knowing where parents are on the ladder and effectively helping them take the next steps—even when some of those steps (like the ones you’ve already taken!) can be doozies.

Adopted from Tim Sullivan online article to recruit school volunteers. Seems to me it should work the same for Scouting!

Ideas for an Cub Scout Recruiting event include:

- **Derby day**—Take your derby track outdoors (school parking lot might be a good location), and have lots of cars for the boys to race. Everyone, fathers included, loves to race those cars!
- **Cub Olympics**—An outdoor field day of games and fun; various activities. In the heat of summer, consider a “water themed” day, full of water activities. Sponge races, water balloons, a water obstacle course, water art, etc.
- **Water bottle rockets**—Talk about a boy magnet! Blast into Scouting!!
- **Fishing event**—Do you have access to a good spot for “kid” fishing? Dads like this one, too. Be sure to bring extra poles and bait.
- **Swimming party**—Does your pack have a summer swim party at a public pool? Make it a dual-purpose event and invite your target membership.
- **Bike rodeo**—Set up a championship course of fun! Have engraving, on-the-spot bike inspections, helmet sizing, etc. Local police and/or firemen will often visit these events, if requested.
- **Treasure hunt**—All kids love treasure hunts. Now they have a fancy name: geocaching! With parent volunteers, GPS systems, and a bit of Web research, there are LOTS of great spots to geocache. You can even hide your own “treasure” in advance. Have a picnic and break up into teams. This involves tromping through parks, sometimes over mud and streams! Boy fun ALL the way. Of course, you can do it the “old fashioned” way too, with treasure maps coffee-stained to look aged, and a few holes burned in strategic spots. Rip the map into pieces so they have to find all the pieces (provide individual clues) to put together the jigsaw puzzle map, and then go find the treasure.
- **Ice cream social**—Nothing sells better than ice cream during the hot summer months! Have some crafts and games, and ice cream treats!
- **S’mores and fun**—Who can turn down a s’more? No one, of course, so expect a turnout. Have crafts and games. Shooting off water bottle rockets in a big field is also a great way to cool down on a hot summer day. Just be sure to have a water source, as once the kids get started with those rockets, it’s hard to keep up with the demand.
- **Trailer climb**—Know someone with an 18-wheeler? Boys love to climb in and all over a truck!
- **Leatherworking/woodworking**—Boys love to hit things with a hammer. If not enough activity for an event, these are great secondary activities for any other event.
- **STEM /Science Night**—STEM encourages the natural curiosity of youth members and their sense of wonder about these fields through existing programs.