

**Conducting the Roundtable in Crossroads of America Council  
Operating in a Vacuum?**

**A question for those who follow.....**

Doctoral Thesis for the University of Scouting  
Joseph C. Bates, Scoutmaster and former Roundtable Chair

## **Conducting the Roundtable in Crossroads of America Council Operating in a Vacuum?**

I served as Roundtable Chairman, Commissioner or whatever you'd like to call it for four years in the Del-Mi District of Crossroads of America Council. I served by myself, putting together an agenda for each month, finding speakers, sometimes speaking myself, and I found it to be a frustrating and lonely job at times. It has occurred to me on numerous occasions that we in scouting operate in a vacuum. There is little, if any cross pollination of ideas. Roundtable and Winter Camporees are two areas where the sharing of ideas would be extremely easy and very rewarding, not only for those in charge of these events but also for the scouts, for whom, after all, we are supposed to be creating an exciting program. (I know; it would be so much more fun without those pesky scouts running around sometimes....)

When I began my search for a subject for my thesis, I was the Roundtable Chair for Del-MI District and I was running out of ideas. I only knew one other chair and he and I did share a few ideas, but I knew there were fourteen of us and I was confident that the group of us had some decent ideas that deserved to be shared.

My first task was to create a list of current Roundtable Chairs. This took over three months of phone calls and emailing to create a new list as the list at the Council was out of date. My list is probably out of date at this point. It is attached at the end of this document, however.

After I finally had spoken with or emailed with each of the persons in charge of their district roundtables and had gotten an OK to include them in a mass emailing of my initial questions, I sent an email to everyone with the questions that are included as Attachment 2. Then the long period of waiting and prodding took place. I had assumed that people would respond quickly and that I would be able to process the answers, get out several more email questionnaires and tabulate the results. This proved to be an incorrect assumption. It took almost nine months to get the last response and one came back hand written! That is to say that adult Scouters may not be as comfortable with the Internet as they should be given today's electronic information system. I never did hear from some of the districts even after repeated emails and phone calls.

My project really turned into a process of emails and phone calls to cajole information out of Scouters who were probably already so busy from saying yes a few too many times that they didn't have a lot of time for me. The time it consumed to get the responses I did finally receive is not reflected on these pages.

The responses are tabulated as Attachment 3. The responses do provide a certain amount of useful information, but they also point out some problems that all districts share. Obviously some of us are better organized than others for one, but everyone has something to share and we should be able to learn from all of the responses. I have emailed the responses to the Roundtable Chairs and hope to have some feedback. I hope that we will figure out a way to

share best practice ideas with each other more quickly. I am not optimistic that this will happen on any grand scale or that the information will flow efficiently based on the initial response, however.

While there is decent information in the responses, the real lesson here is that we are still in the Stone Age for sharing information. I still believe that we need to and must share information if we are to stay ahead of the scouts. I learned from a couple of really smart scoutmasters, with whom I had the pleasure of serving as assistant scoutmaster, that you have to be at least a step or preferably three steps ahead of the scouts if you are to keep them engaged.

I believe that it is imperative that the councils and districts in BSA put a much greater emphasis on the sharing of information. The only effective way to do this is over the Internet. If you consider how many districts there are across the United States and how many really talented people there are in each of them, serving scouting on a volunteer basis, it is ludicrous to assume that this talent pool can be ignored.

I have searched the Internet on numerous occasions for information on Roundtable ideas or Winter Camporee ideas and while there is a fair amount of information out there, it is all coming from troop websites and from individuals who have the willingness, skills and time to put that information out there. It is a really small sampling from an enormous database, however.

Consider the tired ideas that I and others like me have used for Roundtable subjects. Consider the same old themes used at Winter Camporees, year after year with only minor variations. I can't believe that in the tens of thousands of districts in the US that there aren't enough riveting ideas to keep a single district's Roundtable running for years. There have to be enough exciting, different and challenging stations for Winter Camporees to carry a district through an entire generation of scouts before they would need to be repeated.

There are a limited number of ways of gathering these ideas;

1. We could count on individuals to share them as they are now through random web sites found through a search engine.
2. We could recruit a volunteer with the skills, time and energy to gather information in each district in our council and share it with our council through the newsletter. I have acted as that volunteer in this effort and it has been frustrating at best and my success has been limited.
3. We could do the same thing, but have the information entered on the council's web site, or do both.
4. We could make this a part of each district executive's (or someone else in the district or council) job description and ask him or her to gather the information and feed it to whomever is handling the newsletter or council website.

Obviously some of these options would require the commitment of some time, energy and funds on the part of the council. The time commitment is really a small one, though if you

so, what was it? 2) Did you have a REALLY good Camporee with new ideas and wildly successful feedback? What did you do? How did you run it? This wouldn't be a major undertaking, just a few small ones. If you consider the potential for rewards, it seems that the cost/reward ratio question is a silly one, though, because of the numbers involved. In a single council, the numbers aren't wildly overwhelming, perhaps, but considered at a national level, the numbers would be staggering and the ideas should flow like honey to a starved bear. Even at the council level, though, the information pool is very attractive.

Even the sharing of best practice from another council could provide new ideas. I have to assume that we are somewhat inbred in our planning process and that a council in Missouri might have programs that they feel are dull and repetitive. They could be different programs from ours, though, and we might find them refreshing! We can glimpse this when a Scouter transfers here from another council and for a brief moment, we have a bit of new input.

I found it very frustrating to operate in vacuum when I was the district Roundtable Chair. I knew there were resources out there that I could tap into if only I could find a way. When I began this search for my paper, I believed I would gather tons of information, share it with a lot of people and we'd all go away happy. What I found was more frustration. There has to be a better way. The potential reward is too great to ignore and the consequences of ignoring it are too staggering. We are volunteering to provide a program of learning for scouts and to do so, we need to "know and use our resources." I think we know where the resources are. The question is how do we use them?

# Attachment 1

Crossroads of America Council

Boy Scouts of America

## District Boy Scout Roundtable Commissioners

District	Chairman	Address	Telephone	Email Address(es)
AP	Howard Brooks	1009 Hillcrest Drive Greencastle IN 46135	H-- (765) 653-4705 B-- (765) 658-4653	<a href="mailto:brooks@ccrtc.com">brooks@ccrtc.com</a> <a href="mailto:hlbrooks@depauw.edu">hlbrooks@depauw.edu</a>
DM	Pat Donnelly	122 Lake Terrace Ct. Noblesville IN 46060	H-- (317) 877-5321 B-- (317)	<a href="mailto:bike122@insightbb.com">bike122@insightbb.com</a> <a href="mailto:patrick_donnelly@bankone.com">patrick_donnelly@bankone.com</a>
GE	Jim Powell	1908 N. Forest Muncie IN 47304	H-- (765) 288-1946 B--	<a href="mailto:jpowell@bsu.edu">jpowell@bsu.edu</a>
HK	Jo Prairie	1006 Briarwood Drive Brownsburg IN 46112	H-- (317) 852-4039 B--	<a href="mailto:jrdkprairie@aol.com">jrdkprairie@aol.com</a>
IH	Jerry Wilhelm	P.O. Box 411 Morristown IN 46161	H-- (765) 763-6138 B-- (765) 763-6363	<a href="mailto:disney@svs.net">disney@svs.net</a>
NE	Russ Trapp	840 Mount Dora Lane Indianapolis IN 46229	C-- (317) 908-5524 B-- (317) 545-7278	<a href="mailto:rtrapp317@aol.com">rtrapp317@aol.com</a>
NS	Steve James	5147 Carrollton Ave Indianapolis IN 46205	H-- (317) 283-4285 B-- (317) 236-1451	<a href="mailto:hjsj5147@iquest.net">hjsj5147@iquest.net</a> <a href="mailto:SJames@archindy.org">SJames@archindy.org</a>
OT	Chuck McGill	8154 College Corner Road Centerville IN 47330	H-- (765) 855-3379 B-- (765) 983-3235	<a href="mailto:pidbiz@peoplepc.com">pidbiz@peoplepc.com</a> <a href="mailto:mcgillc@reidhosp.com">mcgillc@reidhosp.com</a>
PF	Martin Westerfield	2965 Foxborough Drive Greenwood IN 46143	H-- (317) 422-8333 B--	<a href="mailto:martinpw1@msn.com">martinpw1@msn.com</a>
PIO	Carl Wiker	3522 E 9th Street Indianapolis IN	H-- (317) 955-8889 B--	<a href="mailto:troubleclw@aol.com">troubleclw@aol.com</a>
SC	Harold (Kip) Sloan also John Fitzpatrick Shelley Sparks	N. Cambria E. St. Frankfort, IN 46041 Less (Webmaster -- SC))	H-- (765) 379-9499 B-- H-- (317) 881-5175	<a href="mailto:blindpig55@yahoo.com">blindpig55@yahoo.com</a> <a href="mailto:LESHIPPY1@aol.com">LESHIPPY1@aol.com</a> <a href="mailto:district_commissioner@hotmail.com">district_commissioner@hotmail.com</a> <a href="mailto:sasparks@ix.netcom.com">sasparks@ix.netcom.com</a>
SK	Chris Taylor	3512 Logamar Lane Anderson IN 46011	H-- (765) 683-0443 B-- (765) 641-2068	<a href="mailto:ctaylor@acsc.net">ctaylor@acsc.net</a>
TS	Mike O'Banyel	3924 N Sheridan Ave Indianapolis IN 46226	H-- (317) 546-5046 B--	<a href="mailto:obreferee@juno.com">obreferee@juno.com</a>
WB	Keith Davis	1162 N Smith Pl West Terre Haute IN 47885	H-- (812) 533-6281 B-- (812) 234-5889	<a href="mailto:nemco871@cs.com">nemco871@cs.com</a>

## Attachment 2

Dear Boy Scout Roundtable Chairs,

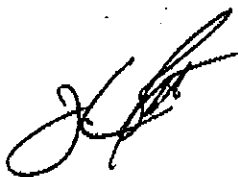
I am sorry this has taken so long to put together. I have been quite busy and I've had a devil of a time getting a complete list of all of you to send this to. Council has no idea who you all are and how to reach you.

I would like to simply share ideas on how you plan and run your roundtable events. Below I've listed a series of questions that will hopefully get us started. Please answer them with as much information as you have time, energy and inclination to share. I will compile the information and send it back to the entire list. Thanks for your help. I think in the long run, this will help all of the roundtables in our districts be a better learning tool.

1. How many people are on your roundtable staff?
2. How many months in advance do you plan your meeting programs? What is your planning process?
3. How do you come up with ideas for speakers or topics?
4. What format do you use for your meetings?
5. How do you handle announcements? Any time limits?
6. Do you have any special events like a kickoff or Christmas party that are done every year? Do they take the place of roundtable or are they tagged on at the beginning or end? Do you meet all year?
7. How do you encourage attendance?
8. What have been the four best programs you've had in the last twelve months? Why have they been so well received?
9. What have been the four worst programs? Why?
10. Do scouts participate in your programs and if so, in what way?

If you can think of other questions you'd like added to the list and sent out, please let me know. If you have no objections, I'll email the entire list of roundtable chairs to everyone. Please let me know if this is all right with you.

Thanks for your help,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. K. ...', located at the bottom left of the page.

3) Guide to Safe Scouting

4) Boards of Review

Many troops are set in their ways concerning these topics and are not as enthusiastic about them. However, all of these topics are discussed and selected at our planning meeting.

Skill building because few remembered to bring skill building activity to share.

Rechartering, OA elections, Firecrafter nominations, Friends of Scouting.

**Do scouts participate in your programs and if so, in what way?**

We had incorporated a SPL council that did training and planning of Camporees and they would sometimes participate in roundtables. It wasn't as helpful as we thought.

Scouts occasionally participate in various ways.

On some occasions Scouts, especially from the OA or Firecrafters have come to explain their programs and promote upcoming events.

Currently they are helping only with the opening and closing ceremonies.

Usually, I have an opening done by scouts. This lets them know that we are meeting together as adults and doing the same sorts of things they do - learning, planning, games, etc.

There is a separate OA/Firecrafter meeting held by Scouts at the same time. Currently Scouts do not participate in the RT meeting.

Not really, this is a Adult oriented program.

Yes, openings and closings, sometime with the theme of the month.

Leaders are encouraged to use scouts for our openings and closings. If the topic lends itself to the use of scouts it is encouraged. When Camporees are announced or discussed, the sponsoring troop often has scouts making the announcement.

Not really.

No answer.

I think the Community meetings were positive. I also thought the October meeting where all leaders took part in or observed during and Eagle Board of Review was well received. A program on memorabilia was a popular one, also a series of short presentations, sort of a show and tell.

The DNR lady, Preparation for Pinewood Derby and Summer Camp prep.

No answer

1) Uniforms, with a very large display of old uniforms.

2) Cooking competition

3) COPE/climbing/rappelling

4) Pioneering

The topics are more fun and we had very good presentations.

Troop planning.

DNR Project Learning Tree & Project WILD, Drug Awareness, Cold weather camping put on by a local sporting goods store.

#### **What have been the four worst programs? Why?**

A program on ADD because the presenter offended many people. There was another presentation a few years later that was a little better, but very dry. A program on canoeing because the presenter was very slow. I can't remember any programs that people didn't like, but the presenters can be a problem.

No answer.

The new popcorn computer program. We needed computers.

No answer.

None.

Our November meeting had good program content but was too long. Should have done TroopMaster presentation as a separate program. Also, announcements got out of hand at 30+ minutes.

None

None

1) Unit finance

2) Disability Awareness



It hasn't been.

We are a small Roundtable, so attendance is pretty good - albeit few. The leaders that do not attend on a regular basis are ones that have "urban" troops made up of boys from group homes, etc.

E-mail reminders and Commissioner invitation.

Interesting speakers and subjects.

Bribery Give aways Every month a troop gets to embellish an article.

I attend the District Commissioners meeting and urge the Unit Commissioners to pitch the RT. The annual schedule is also published on the Pathfinder web site.

Word of mouth.

I've toyed with the idea of door prizes, but have no money.

**What have been the four best programs you've had in the last twelve months? Why have they been so well received?**

Best programs have been anything Dave Bardos does. He's done camping on a shoestring, how to camp comfortably...people love him! A knots and lashings hands-on program was very good. A great program on creating Scouts' Owns. Anytime we can get out of district presenters, people seem to enjoy that (most of the time). All of the skills that we do as programs are good because they get people involved. I always tell presenters to have interactive programs, but of course that doesn't always happen.

With our group, it is hard to tell what they like and what they don't like. Nobody has left early; all comments have been positive, but no ticker-tape parades. I try to occasionally surprise them, without aggravating them.

The presentation by the Firecrafters

The presentation concerning the Red Hawk Camporee

The presentation concerning the merger

The program on planning independent high adventure treks

No answer

The training sessions are always well received. Even though we have a lot of experience around our table, it seems that it is a good thing to go over compass usage, knots, first aid, etc. Probably the biggest hit was a session on tracking.

We do meet all year, but the District has a kickoff that is not associated with the Roundtable.

We have kickoff where a lot of info is distributed in August with dinner at another location. We have a small Christmas party after RT in December; we have a District Awards dinner in March. In addition, we have started holding community meetings during RT where Packs and Troops get together from communities within the District. We had one in September and are going to have another one in March. The June and July meetings are usually held in a Park. We meet all year.

In May we have a carry in and talk about summer camp. In August we have another carry in and kick off the rest of the year, and at Christmas we have everyone bring in treats. We didn't, but now since we are Crossroads we meet all year, summer months are real thin, most are at camp or on vacation.

We meet every month except July.

There is a Kickoff. It is handled by the District Committee. We meet all of the other months with July being our planning meeting. We are trying to get RTs during our three Camporees.

We have a kickoff at Camp Redwing and a final meeting in May at the Camp.

No answer.

### **How do you encourage attendance?**

We have tried many, many things. Few seem to work for us. We'll get the people who want to or can come. All say it is enjoyable and beneficial, but like many, it's the ones who need it most who aren't there. We have done beads, door prizes, we send a postcard each month, we've done monthly troop phone reminders, individual phone reminders, signs at the scout shop, year-end troop and individual awards for attendance, and now a patrol method that makes each patrol responsible. Its effects are still to be decided, but hopefully it gets everybody involved and makes them want to come back.

We keep track monthly, and recognize units with the most leaders in attendance. The unit that wins the most months gets a free District Dinner, and an award. Last year I made a Solid cherry miniature "round table" for the winning Troop, Pack, and Crew, and presented them at the Dinner.

Most paper items of information are only distributed through the Round Tables. IF a unit does not come, then it has to have someone go to the Section Office to pick up the written information.

Long announcements need to be cleared in advance.

A definite problem.

There has never been a problem with the length of this time.

I am planning on having any announcements turned in prior to the meeting and then having one person read the announcements.

There is usually no need for a time limit, but if someone gets wordy then I step in with a reminder about brevity.

Last meeting, announcements at end of meeting. Going forward, we may have all announcements funnel through 4 function chairmen.

Anything I don't have handouts for, I tell them all other important things are on the back table

Yes, 2 minutes or less.

Announcements are presented at the end of the meeting. There are no hard time limit rules. Of course, if someone asks for 1 minute, they need five. I try to keep them moving.

No time limits. I tell everyone to be brief.

No answer.

**Do you have any special events like a kickoff or Christmas party that are done every year? Do they take the place of roundtable or are they tagged on at the beginning or end? Do you meet all year?**

Our program kick-off is in August which is not involved with roundtable. We do have a family Christmas dinner that involves the Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts in December. We meet September – June with nothing in July and kickoff in August.

Kickoff in August is handled by different folks. The first RT. is in September. Nothing special in December. We meet August – June.

We have a special kick-off pitch in August, and an end of the school year pitch-in in May. This year we have met every month, but generally we do not meet in June or July (the heart of outdoor Scout camping programs)

Kickoff is held in August as the Roundtable. We have a final Roundtable in June that is a cookout. We meet every month except July.

