Another Annual General Meeting

Annual General Meetings... We all have one - but why? Do we have to have one? Who should we invite? Who should organise it? What do we have to include?

It can all be a maze when it comes to sorting out Annual Reports, accounts, Charity Trustees and members of the Group Council. It has to be done, but it doesn't have to be complicated...

**Must we have an Annual General Meeting?**

Given that every Scout Group is a charity and many register with the Charity Commission all Scout Groups must have an Annual General Meeting. It is the responsibility of the Group Executive Committee, as the Charity Trustees, to ensure this happens.

**Whose Annual General Meeting is it?**

The Group Council’s. Which leads to the next question...

**Who are the members of the Group Council?**

Membership of the Group Scout Council is open to:

- All appointed Leaders in the Group;
- Colony, Pack and Troop Assistants;
- Occasional Helpers
- Group Scout Active Support members;
- Skills Instructors;
- Administrators;
- Advisers;
- Patrol Leaders;
- Parents of Beaver Scouts, Cub Scouts and Scouts;
- Any other supporters including former Scouts and their parents who may be admitted by the Group Scout Leader or the Group Executive Committee;

These are listed in the Policy, Organisation & Rules of The Scout Association and thereby often lies snag as many a Group Secretary does not have a copy of our Rules. The chances are that the Group Chairman and Treasurer do not have copies either. Such Groups depend on traditional practise which often provides the wrong answer. How many Groups invite the Patrol Leaders to attend? They are members of the Group Council. We talk a great deal about the need for young people to be part of our management structure and fail to offer the realistic opportunities which have been around for years!

**Why do we need an Annual General Meeting of the Group Council?**

Two outstanding reasons:

- For the Group Executive Committee, as the Charity Trustees, to report on Group activities during the past year.
- To allow the Group Council to appoint Group Administrators and a Group Executive Committee for the year ahead.

Those two reasons are not unique to Scouting. All charities local and national are required to have an Annual General Meeting to receive an Annual Report and to appoint a Management Committee.
**How is a report made to members of the Group Council?**

By producing an Annual Report in accordance with our own rules (POR). There are three very important parts of the Annual Report:

- A list of names of the Group Executive Committee.
- A statement of the main activities of the Group to include both the Scouting programme and the work of the Group Executive Committee during the year.
- The Annual Accounts prepared in accordance with SORP and POR.

The Group Executive Committee will need to approve these Accounts before the Annual General meeting as they represent the stewardship of the Group finances by the Committee.

**What do we do with the Annual Report?**

Send it out in advance of the Annual General Meeting to all members of the Group Council and to any guests who are to be invited.

*The Annual General Meeting is a requirement but what about a programme?*

The Annual General Meeting alone is often insufficient to enthuse your guests. Many Groups successfully hold an open evening and display Scouting activities of the past year or invite a guest speaker for after the business has been concluded. Including the young Members of the Group in some form of entertainment ensures the attendance of their parents. More ideas for this segment of the evening are discussed on the following page.

**In addition to producing the Annual Report, what else needs to be done other than fixing a date and venue?**

This depends on the programme on which you have decided. Some likely points are included below...

**Check list**

Planning in advance ensures that everyone knows what they are doing and the event progresses smoothly:

- Decide on an agenda/programme and let everyone involved know. Decide on who will be invited as guests.
- Check administrative arrangements (preparing Annual Report, copying last year's AGM minutes, the agenda and so on).
- Send out the invitations which will include the Agenda for the Annual General Meeting and details of the programme. The Annual Report should go out with the invitations and not be placed on the chairs on the night.
- Co-ordinate involvement from the Sections.
- Organise catering arrangements.
- Check final details (layout of room, seating, reception of guests and so on).

Now it's time to get down to business. Let’s look at how to make sure your AGM runs smoothly.

It’s not as hard as you might think to hold an effective AGM. Like many things in Scouting, you just need to be prepared. Here are a few tips that help you:

**Plan early**

Make sure you circulate meeting dates early and choose a meeting venue and time to suit everyone involved. Send out the agenda with reports and supporting documentation with plenty of time so that everyone can consider their responses.

**Keep to time**

Start and finish on time. To help it can be a good idea to allocate timings for different parts of the agenda. And it’s also good to provide some refreshments.
**Get everyone involved**
Make sure that everyone contributes to the meeting by encouraging them to express their opinion. Assign action points to people to ensure plans move forward.

If everyone takes away one action then everyone feels involved. Make sure you circulate action points within one week of the meeting showing who is responsible for carrying them out. Include an agreed completion date.

**Stick to your decisions**
Once discussion has taken place take time to make sure that everyone understands that the decisions made are to be stuck too. Keep your minutes concise and record the decisions made and action to be taken.

**Don’t waste time**
Avoid excessive time being spent on 'any other business' by asking everyone to submit items for inclusion before the agenda is sent out. Often decisions made on the spur of the moment without thought have to be revisited.

And don't just have a meeting because the date has been set if there is not sufficient items that need to be discussed. There is nothing worse than going to a meeting and just going over old ground. For more information, contact executive.committees@scouts.org.uk

**Steps to success**
To be sure that the event is a success, we need a well planned programme which deals with the formal requirements of the Annual General Meeting and is attractive enough to encourage people to attend. Try to make it the Group occasion of the year by covering four areas needed for success...

1. **Reception**
   From at least 15 minutes before the advertised time of starting, the Group Scout Leader and the Group Chairman need to be in position to welcome people.
   
   Have static displays of activities during the year to bring the Annual Report to life. Make doubly sure that you are ready before your guests start arriving. There is nothing worse than the Members' parents and the local Mayor arriving to find you setting up the chairs.

2. **The Annual General Meeting**
   The Annual Report, having been sent out in advance, will reduce the need for lengthy speeches. The Group Chairman will be in charge of this part of our programme with support coming from the Secretary and Treasurer.
   
   The Group Scout Leader need not make a speech and should remain silent except to nominate the Chairman and some of the members of the Committee and in a few well chosen words thank the Group Administrators and the Committee for their support. In my plan the Group Scout Leader can have a moment of glory later in the programme.
   
   The formal but friendly meeting should take about 30 minutes without any suggestion of undue haste.

3. **Refreshments**
   Tea, coffee and biscuits is often sufficient, but other options are also popular (wine and cheese, buffet, barbecue, cocktails, canapes, sausage sizzle, jacket potatoes, picnic, strawberries and cream) and the break will allow people to mix and look at the displays. The Leaders can ensure that everything is ready for the last, and probably the most enjoyable, part of the programme.
   
   Some Groups prefer to leave the refreshments until the very end to deter guests from taking advantage of the break to slip off home early. Do bear in mind, especially if you have a guest speaker, that this can leave your guests having to remain seated for a very long time.
4. Scouting activities
Youngsters can easily be involved in the programme by providing entertainment or displaying the events of the past year.

Some ideas for a guest speaker...
- Scouts who have represented your Group/District at a Jamboree
- Local historian
- Pet shop owner (with animal guests)
- Sports personality
- Children's entertainer
- Camp fire leader
- Explorer
- Members of uniformed services
- Youth officer
- Crime prevention officer
- Local charity workers
- Gardening expert
- Scout Mountaineering or Water Activities Adviser
- District Team Members
- County Team Members
- Shelter Box

Consider inviting a guest speaker who will appeal to the younger Members of the Group, who will then badger their parents to allow them to attend.

Far better than a lengthy oration by the Group Scout Leader and additional over long contributions from Sectional Leaders... why not show the guests what we do in Scouting?

- A PowerPoint presentation is not new but it can be made up exactly as required. Just one or two slides of any activity will be enough. Cover all Sections of the Group and include a District and a County event. After an introduction by the Group Scout Leader let the Scouts provide the commentary - perhaps the Patrol Leaders (as members of the Group Council)?
- A video sounds attractive but it will need to be well made and shown on a large screen a tv screen is a non-starter! Far better to have any video as part of the displays at reception and during refreshments.
- Scouting's success depends on activity so to demonstrate is better than talk. A tent pitching race is possible indoors. The final of a Pack inter-Six competition would be fun. Once you accept this approach, ideas will flow at Group Scouters' Meetings and from the Scouts themselves. Avoid pointless games.
- We all know that parents are much more likely to turn-up if their children are involved. If you insist on an evening event then think in terms of a Friday in June or July when the evening is light, with sunset after 9pm. Why not break with tradition and have this annual event on a Saturday? Start at 5.30pm and finish by 7.30pm. so there is still something of an evening left for mum and dad! Given that for formula the world is your oyster!

Look at just one possible programme...
You will need a venue with an indoor hall and some spare ground outside. By 5.30pm on the day:
- the Beavers are ready to demonstrate handcrafts,
- the Cubs will be poised to show the visitors a whole host of activities within their training programme.
• the Scouts can be cooking over open fires and stoves and offering the edibles to your guests. Those not required to cook could be pioneering, demonstrating map and compass skills, using local maps and other activities in which parents could participate. Your local Explorer Scout Unit could use the event as a good link exercise displaying the wonders of the last camp or expedition and act of service to the community.

All this activity would go on until 6.45pm when the Group Scout Leader calls everyone indoors for the Annual General Meeting - and that invitation will include the Patrol Leaders and Explorer Scouts.

This second part of our programme begins with a Summing up of the activities by the Group Scout Leader who then hands over to the Group Chairman for the Annual General Meeting. The youngsters outside can continue to enjoy the activities and, supervised by some Leaders, clear up ready for the finish at 7.30pm.

This programme would be much more attractive. You could call it the Group family event with the Annual General Meeting playing its part in the overall programme. Before dismissing the idea, why not have a go on a Saturday or summer evening? Guests such as your local ward councillors, neighbours, representatives of other community organisations and friends would certainly find it more interesting and enjoyable.

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