Annual Program Planning Guide

Every unit that runs a strong program plans it in advance. The framework Scouting America provides for this is the Ideal Year of Scouting, a process that produces three things together: an annual program plan, a budget, and a fundraising plan. Units that skip it are still figuring out October in September.

This page covers when to hold the meeting, who should be in the room, and what to bring. The Ideal Year of Scouting resources at scouting.org are the primary reference for running the meeting itself.

- Scouts BSA troop annual planning conference guide
- Cub Scout Leader Resources

When to hold the meeting

June. Scouting America says late spring or early summer. In this district, June is where that lands in practice.

May looks right, but the end-of-year crunch usually wins. July is possible, but summer schedules start pulling leaders away fast. June, before families scatter, is when you can actually get your Key 3 and committee in a room together.

A planning meeting in July with the right people is better than one never held at all.

Who should be in the room

Unit Key 3. Cubmaster or Scoutmaster, Committee Chair, and Chartered Organization Representative. All three. If one of them isn't there, expect to have the same conversation again at the next committee meeting.

Committee members with event ownership. Treasurer, outdoor activities chair, and event chairs for recurring events. An event chair who helped set the date will run it. One who was handed a date often won't.

For Scouts BSA troops: The Senior Patrol Leader leads the conference, with Patrol Leaders as active participants. The Scoutmaster's job beforehand is to prepare the SPL: explain the process, talk through program options and goals, and share a draft calendar with key dates already placed so the SPL walks in ready to lead. The

plan the youth develop goes to the troop committee for final approval.

For Cub Scout packs: The Pack Committee Chair leads the meeting. Core attendees are the Committee Chair, Cubmaster, and all Den Leaders. Den chiefs and interested parents are welcome. This is a leadership meeting. Gather family input beforehand if you can, and share the finished calendar with all pack families at the first pack meeting of the fall.

What to bring

The district and council calendar. Some dates are fixed before you open the room. Popcorn sale, unit renewal, camporee, Pinewood Derby season, Blue and Gold season, crossover: place these first. Every unit that has ever double-booked a pack meeting against a council event in October knows how that conversation goes. Current district calendar ? District Reference shelf ?

School calendars. Attendance tracks with school schedules more than most leaders expect. In the James River District, units draw from Henrico County, Richmond City, Hanover County, and Goochland County. Check the divisions that apply to your families. The first week back after winter break, the week after spring break, the days around school wellness days and election closures: those are the dates that quietly kill attendance. School calendars are available on each division's website.

Last year's calendar, what actually happened. Not what was planned. Which events drew strong attendance? Which got cancelled? Which months were thin every year? Your own unit's history is the best input for planning you have. If you don't have last year's calendar, this is the year to start keeping one.

What the plan produces

Three documents: a program calendar, a budget, and a fundraising plan. The calendar drives the budget, and the budget sets your fundraising target. Without named owners for each event, it's a calendar of things that might happen.

What the plan is not

The annual plan is not a contract. Events move, leaders change, councils shift dates. A plan made in June will need adjustments in September and again after winter break.

The value is shared intent. When something changes, your Key 3 is adjusting a plan you all agreed to, not building a new one the week before an event.

The recharter connection

Annual planning is also the right time to audit your adult leadership roster. Adults with expiring Safeguarding Youth Training are the most common thing units scramble over in October. Find those gaps now. October is already full.

The roundtable connection

Roundtable runs on the same annual cycle. The May roundtable in the James River District is where the Cub Scouts Roundtable Commissioner reviews the prior year with leaders and works through the coming year's topic calendar. If your unit's planning meeting surfaces questions about the district calendar, what other packs are doing in a given month, or where to find program resources, bring those to roundtable.

- Roundtable Resources

Revision #1
Created 7 May 2026 16:04:06 by Donnie Gladfelter
Updated 7 May 2026 16:12:45 by Donnie Gladfelter