

# The Sea Scout Program and the Role of the Commissioner

## WORKING WITH SEA SCOUT SHIPS



Serving as a commissioner for a Sea Scout ship is very little different from working with Venturing crews, Boy Scout troops, Varsity teams, or Cub Scout packs. The core function of the commissioner being a friend of the unit remains

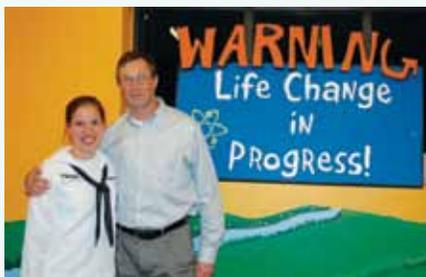
the same. With minor modifications, the commissioner worksheet for crews may be used for ships.

The problems ships encounter are usually human problems, and the solutions are the same as those applied to the same human problems in other Scouting units. A person who is not an expert sailor can still tell if the youth are learning, having fun, and managing their own programs, which are key aims of the Sea Scout program. There is a separate Journey to Excellence worksheet for ships, because some of the program elements and training requirements are slightly different from crew program elements and requirements.

## WHAT TRAINING SHOULD A COMMISSIONER WHO IS WORKING WITH A SEA SCOUT SHIP HAVE?

The basic training requirements for all Sea Scout adult leaders includes: This is Scouting, Venture Leader Youth Protection Training, and Sea Scout Adult Leader Basic Training.

It is recommended that a new Sea Scout commissioner take Sea Scout Adult Leader Basic Training as soon as possible. It is as important, or perhaps even more so, than current basic training in the other Scouting programs, because Sea Scouts is often not in the background experience of new commissioners. The course will introduce them to the few unique challenges, the language, and the many commonalities with other Scouting units. It reemphasizes planning and using resources, and introduces the Sea Scout advancement plan.



To better understand the program and to get to know other leaders, Sea Scout leaders are encouraged to attend a weekend Seabadge course to learn more about the structure of the Sea Scout program and how a ship operates. Seabadge presents the

overall aims and methods of Sea Scouting and how they relate to the purposes of Scouting. The course quickly moves into problem-solving and developing the interpersonal skills necessary for good teaming. This is followed by a study of key issues facing our youth and how we can mentor and counsel them while we help them develop the leadership skills of goal setting, planning, communication, and servant leadership. The course finishes with a review of skills vital to adult leader maintenance such as delegation and networking. Various team exercises follow with each providing the opportunity to demonstrate what is gained from the previous sessions. These exercises are interspersed with sessions that provide additional tools and techniques. If a commissioner is interested in

learning more about on-the-water navigation used by Sea Scouts, Seabadge Underway is offered. It is the mission of this course to provide basic training to prepare Sea Scout adult leaders to teach and manage their ships for the safe operation of a Sea Scout vessel underway in moderate conditions. The adult unit leader (skipper) may or may not be the vessel operator. Many experienced small vessel skippers, including U.S. Coast Guard-licensed vessel operators, are untrained in the proper methods of operating a Sea Scout Ship on underway vessels. The prerequisites of this course are available on the Web at [www.seascout.org](http://www.seascout.org) in the Training section.

## WHAT IS THE SEA SCOUT PROGRAM?

The mission of Sea Scouting is: "To develop, enhance, and expand the Sea Scouts, BSA program in a manner that emphasizes the purposes and achieves the objectives of the Boy Scouts of America, working to help local councils improve their membership and programs."



Sea Scouting is a division of the BSA for young men and women aged 14 (or 13 with the completion of eighth grade) through the age of 20. Its purpose is to bring a character building, citizenship training, and fitness program to the youth of America. Sea Scout ships are organized by churches, civic clubs, schools, maritime organizations, businesses, unions, and other community organizations that provide adult volunteer leaders, program resources, and meeting facilities. Ships plan programs related to maritime careers, seamanship, and service.

Sea Scouting started in 1912 and has a long and colorful tradition. Thousands of young men and women have had the opportunity to follow the traditions of the sea while learning what the future holds for a career related to the sea or a lifelong hobby of recreational boating. Many Sea Scout ships maintain sail or power vessels; follow a challenging rank advancement program; and have nautical uniforming, customs, and ceremonies.

The official voice of the program is on the Web at [www.seascout.org](http://www.seascout.org). You can find almost anything you need related to the program on the Sea Scouting website.

If you would like to hear more about the Sea Scout program, go to the Commissioners website ([www.scouting.org/commissioners](http://www.scouting.org/commissioners)) and click on "National Commissioner's Podcast" to listen to the "A Look at Sea Scouting" podcast (Summer 2008): In this episode, Tico takes a look into one of our oldest programs and learns that it may be one of the best-kept secret successes in the organization.

## WHAT DOES A SEA SCOUT SHIP DO?

The program of a Sea Scout ship is based on matching the interests of the members with the skills, equipment, and resources of the chartered organization. Most ships follow the traditional advancement program found in the Sea Scout Manual, No. 620543, available through your local Scout shop or at [www.scoutstuff.org](http://www.scoutstuff.org). The ship's program follows the customs and traditions of the sea and encourages members to earn the ranks of Apprentice, Ordinary, Able, and Quartermaster (equivalent to the BSA Eagle rank for Sea Scouts).

Sea Scout advancement includes uniforms, safety, customs, swimming, boating, marlinspike seamanship, piloting, signaling, drill, cruising, galley, sailing, boats, tackle, first aid, navigation, boat maintenance, engines, sea history, lifesaving, equipment, weather, radio, customs, and ideals. In other words, anything nautical.

Some Sea Scout ships prefer to plan their program around a specialty, such as sailing, careers, scuba diving, or an aquatic sport. They may not use Sea Scout uniforms and advancement, but they offer a flexible program to those young adults having a specific career or hobby interest.

### **WHERE IS THE PROGRAM RELATED TO MEMBERSHIP AND UNITS?**

In February of 2016 Sea Scouts was recognized as an independent program in the BSA. Membership and unit designations are no longer part of Venturing membership. Sea Scout ships, as well as youth and adult members, still follow the standards of membership. The advancement and awards program of the Sea Scouts is available to only registered Sea Scouts. A youth who meets the age requirements to join can also belong to Boy Scouts, Venturing, and Sea Scouts all at the same time.

Attending Seabadge will help a commissioner support his assigned Sea Scout units. The course will provide more human and material resources, some networking, and a more thorough understanding of the specifics of leadership of Sea Scouts.

Sea Scouting is an adventure at sea and on land. It's a chance to learn and have fun at the same time. Sea Scouting is organized to promote better citizenship and to improve members' boating skills and knowledge through instruction and practice in water safety, boating skills, outdoor, social, and service experiences, and knowledge of our maritime heritage.

Youth can learn to sail, row, and keep a boat in shape; they can cruise local waters or go sailing on long cruises far from home. Youth can learn to scuba dive and take care of boats. Sea Scout youth are active in camping, social events, tours, regattas, excursions, and seamanship contests. They have a chance to develop maritime skills that can lead to careers later on.

Most ships hold regular, weekly meetings either at their chartered organization or aboard their vessels. Many are formal meetings conducted in either full dress or work uniforms with ceremony. Swimming, lifesaving, first aid, Coast Guard Auxiliary Sailing Skills and Seamanship, and cardiopulmonary resuscitation courses are taught with the ship by their own adult leaders and youth officers. The state safe boating course is also offered by many ships. These courses are open to the public. Occasionally movies are shown, contests between the ship's crews are held, or inter-ship visits are arranged.

### **HOW IS SEA SCOUTS MANAGED ON A COUNCIL LEVEL?**

The position of the council Sea Scouts commodore is used in some councils where there are multiple ships chartered. Each council appoints this position and determines the hierarchy within the volunteer structure. This person should have the ability to recruit and give leadership to the various subcommittees and should have influence with the maritime community. Experience as a Sea Scout leader is desirable but not necessary.

If the council uses this approach, the position's responsibilities would include:

#### ***Principal Responsibilities***

1. To be responsible for working directly with the council Sea Scout committee as chair in organizing and planning a healthy and progressive Sea Scout program.
2. To establish and maintain cooperative relationships with the entire organization with a special emphasis on cooperation with other special interest Venturing clusters.

3. To recruit, train, and direct vice commodores to coordinate the functions of the Sea Scouts committee through sales, training, program, service, and boat and gear teams.
4. To work in cooperation with the council staff member assigned to Sea Scouts.
5. To conduct regular meetings of the council Sea Scouts committee. Give leadership to their efforts, set objectives, and make decisions in the best interests of Sea Scouts.
6. To encourage councils to organize new Sea Scout ships and improve the quality of existing ships leading to longer tenure of members and leaders.
7. To supervise the policies and standards related to Sea Scout advancement, activities, and programs such as regattas, training courses, or conferences if desired by councils.
8. To develop and support, upon request, Sea Scout functions at regional, area, and council Boy Scouting, Venturing, and Sea Scout activities and conferences.
9. To serve as a liaison between council, area, and regional Sea Scouts Committee.
10. To establish and maintain cooperative relationships with council boating and maritime organizations.

Some councils have the person who is overseeing the Sea Scout program reporting to the council program vice president. The main thing to remember is to have representation of the Sea Scout program in guiding the decisions that are made.

### **HOW CAN SEA SCOUTS HELP YOUR COUNCIL AND THE OTHER PROGRAMS?**

The support that can be provided by your local Sea Scout ships can be a great addition to helping your other Scouting units. They can assist Cub Scout packs with learn-to-swim activities, Cub Scout cruises, and district and council nautical boating activities. They can assist Boy Scouts with their aquatics merit badges and other boating activities, either on a unit, district, or council level. Venturing crews can work closely with their local ships in planning day or overnight activities centered around nautical activities. Many of these activities can help the Sea Scouts earn their service and advancement rank requirements.

This article originally appeared in the Summer 2011 edition of The Commissioner. Modifications were made to correct new changes. For more information, visit [seascout.org](http://seascout.org) or contact us by email at [seascouts@scouting.org](mailto:seascouts@scouting.org).