Starting a Group

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There are a number of considerations when starting a new group. You will need at least two non-related rovers to ensure two-deep leadership, and it is generally a good idea to have several families who are interested in participating. If you don't have other families involved at this point, you can check out the Lone Scout Program.

All new scout groups are required to have at least one trained leader to be granted a provisional charter. For more information about our training program, check out the Group Organization page.

Once you have read through this primer and decided that you are interested in moving forward with starting a group, the next steps are as follows:

1. Contact your regional commissioner
2. Answer an online questionnaire and provide references
3. Participate in an interview with your regional commissioner
4. Attend a Brownsea Training Camp (BTC3)
5. Get your charter and start scouting

Group Identity

In OSG, groups are identified using a name, a number, and a neckerchief design. One of the first steps in establishing a new group is establishing these and getting them approved by National.

Name and Ordinal

Each OSG group has a unique number (ordinal) and name, usually of some local significance. You will want to run your ordinal by National to ensure that your group is the only one using it. Some groups use a local area code or number of importance to them, others just pick one that sounds good.

Group names will ideally connect your scouts to the community/region you serve and scout in. Groups often draw inspiration from local flora and fauna, places, and historic names. If you are looking for ideas, reaching out to your regional commissioner or other GSMs is a good idea.

Keep in mind that long or complicated names may present challenges when it comes to things like shoulder flash or social media platforms. Names should also be significant, not just to you, but to all the scouts who will be participating in your group, including those from different backgrounds and communities.

Other considerations for names:

- Avoid city names - if another group joined in your area, would it seem odd to have only one group named after your city when there are two groups located there?
- Avoid exclusionary names or those that celebrate individuals/places/events which would reflect poorly on OSG
- Be careful when considering indigenous or tribal names, which could be considered cultural appropriation. Relevant tribal permission/blessing should be obtained in writing before adopting any indigenous people, tribe, or place names.
- Think about how the name and number sound together. You will likely be shouting the name of your group at some point, does it roll off the tongue?
- If you are considering naming a group after a specific person, think about whether that person is the best representation of your community and values and whether that name sends a message of inclusion to all.
- The terms “scouts” or “scouting” are trademarked by BSA and Girl Scouts in the United States and may not be used when opening accounts, registering for an EIN, or submitting any other official filings.

Once you have secured your group's name and ordinal, it's a good idea to obtain the domain name and social media accounts associated with those names. Aim for consistency and try to keep the handle the same across platforms where possible. For more information about using social media platforms, check out the Recruitment and Advertising page.

Neckerchief ("Necker") Design

Each group has their own Necker design. Neckers are square and should only feature colors and geometric borders/shapes. Embroidered and silkscreened designs and other embellishments are not allowed. Groups may have the same design as another group in a different colorway, or use the same colors in a different design, but may not have the same design and colors.

Group neckers should not be more than half red or half brown, as those are the colors reserved for HQ and Lone Scouts (red) and for Brownsea Training Camp (brown).

Neckers can be purchsed from Just Neckers in Canada, although groups may also opt to make their own. There are two sizes of neckers used in the program: 32“ square neckers for Otters and Timberwolves, and 36” square neckers for Pathfinders and Rovers.

Shoulder Flash

Each OSG group has a standardized shoulder patch, called a “flash”. This is worn on the right shoulder and includes the name and ordinal of the group. They can be ordered through the quartermaster and take a few weeks to arrive. You should specify whether you have a preference for all-caps or initial caps.

Legal Structure

When forming a group, there are some legal implications to consider in terms of how it is structured. Even if you are not applying for 501c3 status immediately, there are still benefits to registering as a nonprofit at the state level, including limiting your personal liability. Outdoor Service Guides groups would fall under the Public Benefit Corporation category, as the mission revolves around providing youth outdoor education and service opportunities. You will need to have articles of incorporation and bylaws in place to register.

Once you have registered with the Secretary of State, you can go about applying for an EIN. This allows you to open a business bank account in the name of the group. Once you have an EIN, you can consider applying for 501c3 status. The primary benefits to being a 501c3 is that income is not taxed and that you may apply for grants without needing an external fiscal sponsor. Nonprofit status may also affect your ability to get insurance. the downsides of becoming a 501c3 are additional record keeping and filing requirements. Groups are not required to hold 501c3 status but it is recommended that they incorporate and obtain an EIN to limit personal liability.

Groups in some locations (such as Portland, OR and Brooklyn, NY) have established local councils that may be able to assist with the process of organizing and registering a new group, as well as obtaining insurance at a discounted rate.

Articles of Incorporation

Articles of incorporation are a legal document required to file with the Secretary of State. They are a public document that create and form the foundation of a corporation, nonprofit or otherwise.

Bylaws

Bylaws are a legal document required to obtain nonprofit status. These detail the rules, structure and workings of your organization. Bylaws may change over time as your group grows and can be amended by a vote of the board of your group.

Yearly Filings

Once your group is established, whether you are a nonprofit or not, you will have yearly filings that need to be done. Filing requirements vary by state. You can check here to find out what the annual filings are where you are located. Late or missed filings can result in fines or your nonprofit status being revoked.

Insurance & Liability

Groups are responsible for obtaining general liability insurance. You may also want to consider carrying volunteer liability insurance to protect your leaders and volunteers, as well as directors and officers insurance to protect your board. In cases where there is more than one group in a geographic area, they may consider pooling their resources purchase insurance together. This reduces costs overall.

One thing to note is that some activities may not be covered under your general liability insurance and may require an additional rider. Check with your insurance broker to find out whether specific activities are covered.

Groups have had success obtaining insurance through the following companies:

Nonprofit Insurance Alliance

Banking

Once you have registered with the Secretary of State and obtained an EIN, you will be able to open a bank account. You should plan to have at least two signers on the account, one being the treasurer. The other signer should also be a member of the auxiliary council, either the chair, secretary, or GSM. Bank accounts should not be linked to any signer's personal bank accounts. You should also have a third person who is not a signer on the account but has visibility on the account and conducts regular audits.

If the members of the auxiliary committee change, you will need to record the change in the meeting minutes of your group council, then take those minutes with you to the bank to have the signers updated. You will also need to update the change with the secretary of state when you do your yearly filing.

Setting Registration Fees

Registration fees are the primary source of income for most OSG groups. At the same time, we are an organization committed to equity and it is important to consider affordability when it comes to determining these fees. As an all-volunteer organization, we don't have to pay for staffing, which is one of the most expensive parts of operating a youth program, however there are other costs that must be taken into account.

In order to make scouting truly accessible to everyone, it's important to have scholarships available to anyone who needs them. Another option to subsidize your programming is through fundraising, either through a concerted fundraising effort or through writing grants. Some areas seek to make scouting completely free to all scouts through fundraising efforts.

One other note on fundraising is that a number of families are drawn to OSG because there is not a lot of emphasis placed on fundraising efforts. You can find more information about fundraising in general on the Group Finances page.

Costs

There are a number of costs that are important to take into account when determining group expenses and dues:

- **Yearly Registration Fee:** $20 per person, including youth, rovers, and background checked adults.
- **Insurance:** This can vary widely depending on number of scouts and amount of insurance taken out. A reasonable estimate is somewhere around $25 per registered scout per year.
- **Uniforms (Neckers), Patches, and Handbooks:** While most groups expect their family to purchase the shirts for their uniforms, groups provide the neckers and patches. Neckers are designed on a group by group basis and the cost may range from $5 to $20 depending on material and whether they are bought or made by volunteers. Patches/badges range from $0.50 to $2.00 each. You may consider charging more the first year to absorb the cost of the necker. Handbooks cost $12 - $25 depending on the section.
- **Camping Fees:** Between food and campsite fees, this is generally around $25 per person for a weekend long campout at a public fee based group site. If you are camping off grid or backpacking it may be closer to $15 per person. You can charge these on a per-trip basis or include them in your yearly fee.
- **Activity Fees:** This varies quite a bit depending on what you do. If you do a particularly high-cost activity, you could consider an extra charge for that if your group cannot absorb it.
- **Group Equipment and Storage:** Many groups own some amount of shared equipment, which they may lend to other groups in the area or use only for their own group. This equipment must be stored somewhere, either at a scout family's property or in rented storage space.
- **General Group Admin Costs:** This includes things like the group charter, state filing fees, and miscellaneous admin expenses.
- **Scholarship Fund** Many groups offer sliding scale fees for families that may otherwise not be able to afford scouting.

So an example cost breakdown for a scout's yearly costs would be:

- $20 registration
- $25 insurance
- $20 necker (first year only)
- $15 badges/handbooks
- $5 administrative costs
- $5 scholarship fund

That gives a base cost for the first year of scouting of $90 ($70 thereafter), not including activity fees. If you are charging dues, you can determine what additional costs you want to build into the yearly fee and what you want to charge for separately. Some groups build in $30 - $50 for activity and equipment costs throughout the year but charge separate camping fees. Others build in the camping costs to the yearly dues so families don't have to pay separately for campouts.

If you have scouts join throughout the year rather than just at the start of the scouting year, you may consider prorating the dues for the first year depending on when in the scouting year they join, since they would not be incurring the same costs as a scout who was with the group for the entire year.

One other budget consideration is that you may want to consider not charging rovers/background checked adults who are volunteering their time as leaders. It may be slightly more expensive to spread that cost out among the group, but it is a way to acknowledge the time and energy that leaders put into leading youth sections.

Scholarships

You could simply say that you offer scholarships to anyone that needs them, but another way to accomplish this without causing embarrassment to lower-income families is through a pay-what-you-can system. You can have a self-selected tiered pricing system:

- Pay the Actual Cost: The actual program cost
- Pay a Little More: The program cost plus an extra donation to support scholarships (maybe 10 - 20% more)
- Pay a Little Less: A subsidized amount (maybe ~50% of the total)
- Also offer the option to request a larger discount if needed

Families who can afford to pay a little more are generally happy to do so, and that allows families who may otherwise not be able to participate to do so without feeling singled out. This works well for camping trip expenses, but you could also use it for general dues.

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Last update: **2024/04/26 23:51**