

## Improving Venturing Operations at the District Level

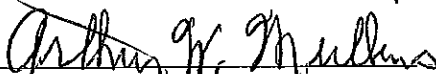
Robert Randolph  
Assistant District Commissioner  
Unaka District  
Great Smoky Mountain Council  
Boy Scouts of America

March 2011

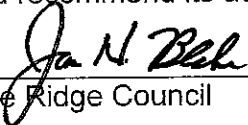
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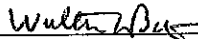
To the Doctoral Candidate Review Board:

I am submitting herewith a Dissertation written by Robert Randolph, entitled "Improving Venturing Operations at the District Level." I have examined the final copy of this report for format and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Commissioner Science.

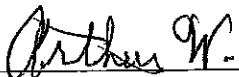
  
Arthur Mullins

We have read this Dissertation  
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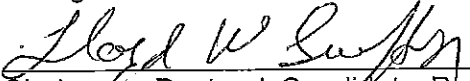
  
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## Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore ways to improve district operations with respect to Venturing, particularly in my home district, a small rural district with few Venturing units. The information discovered during research for this dissertation, as well as my conclusion, will be shared with the district chairman, district commissioner and the district executive of the Unaka District of the Great Smoky Mountain Council.

My interest in Venturing began in 2006 while attending a Venturing Leader Specific Training course. As a unit commissioner at the time, I attended the course to gain a better understanding of the program. During the course I learned of how a Crew can be anything the youth want it to be, from a high adventure club to an amateur radio club. I also learned of how it is designed to be a youth-run program from the unit level all the way to the national level. With what I learned in this course, it became evident to me that Venturing is the best program that the Boy Scouts of America has to offer. I currently serve on the district training committee as the Venturing training coordinator.

This dissertation contains general Venturing information and information specific to the Unaka District. A survey was conducted among Venturing leaders across the country to determine the organizational patterns and use of Venturing committees in other districts and councils. From this collected data, Venturing literature, and my personal observations, recommendations were made.

## General Venturing Information

There are two types of units that fall under Venturing, Venturing Crews and Sea Scout Ships. Both types of units use the same methods and have a similar program

Venturing began as a part of the Boy Scouts of America in 1998 when the career field Exploring Posts were transferred to Learning for Life. The remaining Posts became Venturing Crews, and all Sea Exploring Ships became Sea Scout Ships. Sea Scouts are a sub-component of Venturing, able to do everything Venturers can and more.

Young men and women ages 13-20 are eligible to go join Venturing. Venturing Crew specialties fall into five general categories, arts and hobbies, outdoors, Sea Scouting, sports, and religious life which are represented by the five Bronze Awards, one for each category. The methods of Venturing are leadership, group activities, adult association, recognition, the ideals, high adventure and sports, and teaching others.

The youth leader of a crew is the president, who is assisted by a vice president of administration and a vice president of program. The other crew officers are the secretary and treasurer. Other positions of responsibility in a crew are crew guide, historian, quartermaster, den chief, webmaster, and Leave No Trace trainer.

Activity chairs are youth members appointed by the crew president to lead each crew activity. Depending on the size of the activity, the activity chair will work with a

committee or work alone. Activity chairs work with adult consultants, who are experts in the activity in which the crew is going to participate.

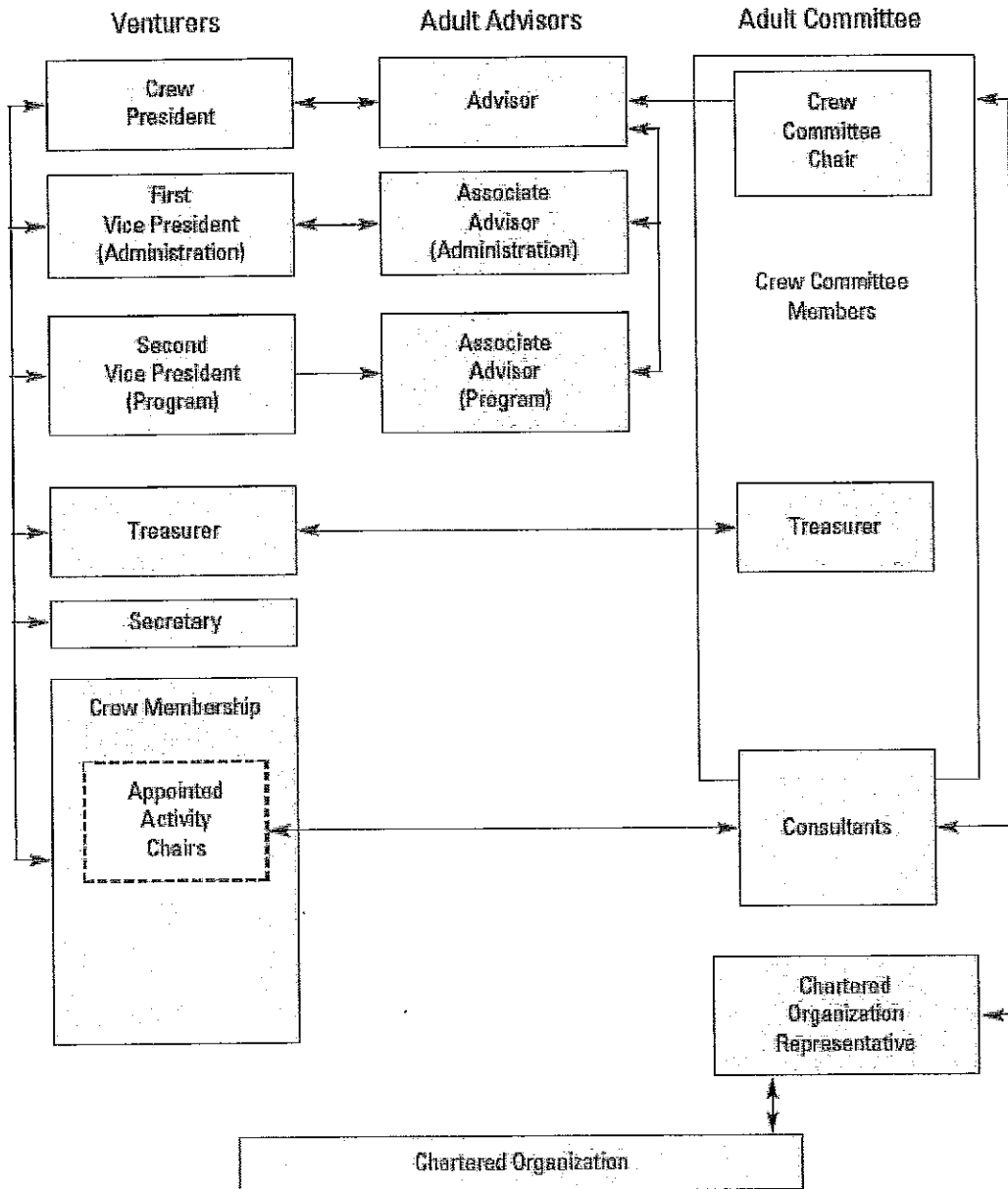
The youth leader of a ship is the boatswain, who is assisted by the boatswains mate. Crew leaders and assistant crew leaders lead sub units of the Ship called crews, which is separate from Venturing Crews. Other positions of responsibility in a ship are yeoman, purser, storekeeper, specialist and bugler.

The advisor is the adult leader of a crew, and is assisted by associate advisors. (see chart, page 4.) In a ship, the adult leader is the skipper, with the assistance of mates. Both types of units have a committee with a chair, and a chartered organization representative who oversees all Boy Scout units chartered by the same organization.

At the district level, other than the Venturing roundtable commissioner and staff, there is no set organization for Venturing. "Administration of Venturing Councils and Districts" explains different forms of organization, from just one person responsible for Venturing to full committees. Just like Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts the district provides support to Venturing from the district committee and the commissioner staff. The district committee provides finance, membership, and program support, and the commissioner staff provides unit service support.

One of the main differences in Boy Scouts and Venturing is advancement. Boy Scouts use the Advancement method, Venturing uses Recognition. According to "Advancement Committee Policies and Procedures", "With the exception of Sea Scouts, BSA, there are no ranks in the Venturing program." The only true advancement in a

# TYPICAL CREW ORGANIZATION CHART



(Venturing Leader Manual)

Venturing Crew is available to male Venturers who have earned the First Class ranks in a Boy Scout Troop or Varsity Scout Team, they are allowed to continue to work towards the Eagle Scout rank. Venturing has several awards the youth may pursue, Bronze Awards, Gold Award, Ranger Award, TRUST Award, Quest Award, Shooting Sports Outstanding Achievement Award, and Silver Award, the highest level of award in Venturing. The ranks in Sea Scouting are Apprentice, Ordinary, Able and Quartermaster.

To earn the Silver Award the Venturer must earn at least one Bronze Award and the Gold Award, demonstrate proficiency in emergency preparedness and leadership, explore ethical decision making, and be reviewed by a panel of youth and adults from the crew.



## Venturing in the Unaka District

As of the writing of this dissertation, the Unaka District has three crews and one ship. I am the only one on the district committee with a Venturing responsibility, and the one ship and one of the crews have unit commissioners assigned. The district chairman is also the skipper of the ship, and the district executive was active in Venturing as a youth and earned the Silver Award.

The district has never hosted a Venturing activity or event nor do we have a Venturing roundtable commissioner. All four of our Venturing units are relatively small and most of their top unit leaders have other scouting positions, including scoutmaster, assistant scoutmaster and district chairman.

The units engage in camping, hiking, and backpacking, with no interaction with the other crews in the district or the council. Occasionally a crew advisor will attend a Boy Scout roundtable.

## Ways for a District to Support Venturing

Laid out in "Administration of Venturing for Council and Districts" are three options for a council to be organized to support crews and ships.

1. Incorporating Venturing into Existing Operating Committees
2. Stand-Alone Venturing Committee
3. Council Vice President of Venturing with No Specific Venturing Committee

Options one and two can be incorporated into the district structure.

From a commissioner stand point there are two ways to provide support to Venturing units: unit commissioners and the Venturing Program Forum. Unit commissioners provide unit service to the crews and ships by visiting the unit frequently and helping them solve any problem they may have or helping them catch an issue before it becomes a problem. There are two ways to handle commissioner assignments with Venturing units: unit commissioners with a mix of units and those with only Venturing units. With either of these, a district with several Venturing units could have an assistant district commissioner for Venturing to handle the special needs of these units.

The Venturing Program Forum conducted by the Venturing roundtable commissioner is another way for the district to support Venturing units. This is a meeting of advisors and skippers that has a how to section, activity section, and a

program section. The how to section covers topics from how to conduct an annual planning retreat to conducting a safe program. The activities section covers simple games that can be played during crew meetings. During the program section information on activities that crews may want to participate in are shared.

A Teen Leaders Council or Venturing Officer Association is a district or council organization that plans Venturing activities for the crews and ships in the district or council. Its membership and scope are determined by the councils Venturing by-laws, with two examples given in "Administration of Venturing Councils and Districts".

## Survey

I conducted a survey of the organization of Venturing support in the respondents' district or council (Appendix A). The survey was sent out to over fifty people with Venturing positions of responsibilities throughout the country. They were contacted by email and on scouting message boards on the internet. I had a total of 20 responses'. Here are the results of survey:

- Seventy-five percent of the respondents have a standing Venturing committee at the district or council level, fifty-eight percent at the district level.
- Five percent do not have a standing committee, but have a Venturing representative on some or all of other standing committees
- Fifteen percent do not have a standing committee or a Venturing representative on some or all of other standing committees, but they do have an at-large Venturing committee member or a Venturing chair without a committee.
- Thirty percent of the respondents indicated that they have no formal Venturing representation on their district committee.
- Eighty percent indicated that have a Teen Leaders Council, Venturing Officer Association, etc, which meet from monthly to quarterly.

- Eighty percent have Venturing Monthly Program Forum or Venturing Roundtable, which meet from monthly to quarterly.
- Eighty-five percent have districts or councils that hold Venturing events or activities, which are held monthly to annually.

Below is a sample of the responses that I received:

Does your district or council have a Venturing standing Committee?

- No
- For our Crew, we have a small adult committee that meets occasionally. We just got started this year in March, so we haven't had a lot of meetings. We will grow this.
- District no, council yes.

If your district or council does not have a standing Venturing committee, is there someone that is responsible for venturing on the other committees?

- No
- No
- We have Venturing reps on selected council committees, including advancement/recognition, training and commissioner cabinet (ACC/Venturing).

If your district or council does not have a standing Venturing committee nor someone that is responsible for venturing on the other committees, is there an at-large Venturing chair without a committee?

- No
- The district has a Venturing Chair, as does the Council. Neither committee has any permanent members other than the chair.
- Yes, at both the district and council levels.

Does your district or council have a Teen Leaders Council, Venturing Officer Association, etc? If so, how often do they meet?

- Yes - held at the Council level. Every other month.
- Yes, in the past they met quarterly –the new group elected this year are pushing for more meetings as they realize they need to get more youth involved and that takes more consistency and planning.
- Yes. Using terminology suggested by the national office we have a TLC open to reps from all crews and ships. They meet monthly on Sunday evenings at our council office.

Does your district have a Venturing program forum? If so how often do they meet?

- Yes, they meet every two to three months.

- The Venturing Roundtables are a part of the Council's Quality Leader Events. They are held about once per quarter.
- Venturing is mentioned sometimes at the District Roundtable - just whenever something comes up. There is an allotted time for it.

Does your district or council hold Venturing activities or events? If so, how often?

- Powderhorn is held yearly in conjunction with a neighboring council. Activities are usually in combination with Boy Scout activities. Our Crew attends many out of council Venturing and Sea Scouting activities.
- Once a year -- Camp Alaska - similar to a Klondike
- Yes. We have at least 3 per year: a "Super Weekend" each spring open to Venturers and Explorers, a "Summer's Last Bash" in August, and a Training Weekend usually in January for VLSC and VLST. We also have a Powder Horn course and a Kodiak course at least every other year.

Are there any suggestions that you might have or comments you would like to make concerning Venturing in your council or district?

- The most rewarding part of what we have done over the last 2 years is turning event planning over to the youth members of the VOA. It has met with mixed success, but has in my opinion been a step in the right direction. It has also, unfortunately, left some of our adults struggling with figuring out what their

role is in the Council-level structure for Venturing, since some of their functions are being transferred to the youth. This is an issue we have not yet resolved and is prompting us to revisit our relationship between the council Venturing committee and the VOA.

- I would like to see a better Troop/Crew relationship. Meaning Troops filtering older boys into crews but it seems like most SMs would rather hold onto a boy until he ages out then try to keep him as an ASM. Not sure how to build a relationship where it's not Crew Advisors against Scoutmasters.
- We do not have a tremendously strong Venturing presence but have been growing steadily (on kind of a roller coaster) for the past 10 years. As in most Councils, the emphasis is on Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts with Venturing as only a money producing afterthought. This is a direct reflection of how National perceives the program, as well.



## Conclusion and Recommendations

At the beginning of the research for this dissertation, I had no idea that so many districts and council were facing the same issues in regard to Venturing that the Unaka District is facing. What was even more surprising is the range of Venturing support, from none at all to districts and councils that have every possible Venturing committee position filled and frequent Venturing activities.

The "Administration of Venturing for Council and Districts" manual is the source from BSA on how to organize a district committee with respect to Venturing. I do not believe its recommendations take into account the issues a small rural district faces. These issues include smaller population base to draw volunteers from, large geographic area, less units, and so on.

My recommendations, based on the issues listed above, to the Unaka District are:

1. Have an at large Venturing chair on the district committee. This person would handle all of the committee functions concerning Venturing, but would be able to recruit additional people for specific committee functions as needed. This person would essentially be a member of all of the standing committees of the district. Preferably this Venturing committee would have at least one other member besides the chair. This would basically merge all three options listed

in "Administration of Venturing for Council and Districts" into one person or a very small committee.

2. At this time I believe the Venturing chair needs to focus on the membership and activities and civic services functions of the district committee.
3. Appoint a Venturing roundtable commissioner to hold Venturing Program Forums. The Venturing Program Forums should be held bimonthly to quarterly. This person could also be the at large Venturing chair or a member of the Venturing committee
4. Create a Venturing Officers Association, with members consisting of the president of each crew and the boatswain of the ship. The purpose of this group is to organize and carry out district Venturing events.
5. Recruit a unit commissioner for the remaining two crews

With only four Venturing units I do not believe an assistant district commissioner for Venturing is needed at this time.

## Addendum

A lot has changed in the Unaka District and the Great Smoky Mountain Council in relation to Venturing since I started this dissertation. Two of the Crews in the district have folded, leaving only a Crew and Ship. The Crew was assigned a Unit Commissioner shortly before it folded. We now have a Council Venturing Committee, of which I am a member. Several council wide Venturing events have been planned for next year, and the creation of a Venturing Officers Association is in the planning stages.

Based on these recent changes, I have revised my recommendations. If the district were to gain two or more new crews, my original recommendations should be reviewed by the district key 3.

1. Remind all of the standing committees on the District Committee to be mindful of the Venturing Crew and Sea Scout Ship in their operation, and encourage the membership committee and District Executive to make a plan on how to charter new crews.
2. Encourage the leadership of the Crew and the Ship to attend the Boy Scout Roundtable and work with the Boy Scout roundtable commissioner to see if there is a way to provide a small bit of support during the roundtable.
3. Encourage youth of the Crew and Ship to participate in the "to be formed" Council Venturing Officer Association.

## Bibliography

Venturing Leader Manual

Administration of Venturing for Councils and Districts

Venturing Monthly Program Forum

Advancement Committee Policies and Procedures

## Appendix A

### Survey

Hello,

My name is Robert Randolph and I am an assistant district commissioner and Venturing training coordinator in the Unaka District of the Great Smoky Mountain Council in Tennessee. I am currently working on my Doctorate of Commissioner Science at the Piedmont-Appalachian College of Commissioner Science. My doctoral dissertation is "Improving Venturing Operations at the District Level".

Here is a bit of background information that I have in the rough draft of my dissertation:

As of the writing of this dissertation, the Unaka District has three crews and one ship. I am the only one on the district committee with a Venturing responsibility, and one of the crews and the ship have a unit commissioner assigned. The district chairman is also the skipper of the ship, and the district executive was active in Venturing as a youth and earned the Silver Award.

The district has never had hosted a Venturing activity or event nor do we have a Venturing roundtable commissioner.

I came across your contact information on the internet indicating that you have a district or council Venturing position and would like to ask you a few questions about Venturing in your district or council. If you have a district function please respond about your district, or if you have a council function please respond about your council.

Do you have a standing Venturing committee?

If not, do you have a Venturing representative on each of the other committees?

If not, do you have at large Venturing committee member a Venturing chair without a committee?

Do you have a Teen Leaders Council, Venturing Officer Association, etc?

If so, how often do they meet?

If you have a district function, do you have Venturing Monthly Program Forum or Venturing Roundtable?

If so, how often do they meet?

Does your district or council hold Venturing actives or events?

If so, how often?

Are there any suggestions that you might have, would care to share your Venturing experiences or would like share how Venturing is organized at the district or council where you live please do so here:

Name:

District:

Council:

Venturing Position:

Thanks for your time,

Robert Randolph

## Appendix B

### Condensed Survey Responses

Do you have a standing Venturing committee?

1. Yes
2. district level—no, council level- yes
3. No
4. No
5. Yes
6. No
7. Yes
8. Yes
9. Yes.
10. Yes
11. Yes
12. No
13. No
14. Yes
15. Yes
16. district level—no, council level- yes
17. district level—no, council level- yes
18. Yes
19. Yes
20. Yes

If not, do you have a Venturing representative on each of the other committees?

1. <Did not respond>
2. No
3. No
4. No
5. <Did not respond>
6. No – for both
7. No
8. <Did not respond>
9. Yes, Some
10. <Did not respond>
11. <Did not respond>
12. No
13. No
14. No

15. No
16. No
17. <Did not respond>
18. <Did not respond>
19. <Did not respond>
20. <Did not respond>

If not, do you have at large Venturing committee member or a Venturing chair without a committee?

1. <Did not respond>
2. <Did not respond>
3. No
4. Yes
5. <Did not respond>
6. No
7. No
8. <Did not respond>
9. No
10. <Did not respond>
11. Yes
12. No
13. Yes
14. <Did not respond>
15. <Did not respond>
16. No
17. <Did not respond>
18. <Did not respond>
19. <Did not respond>
20. <Did not respond>

Do you have a Teen Leaders Council, Venturing Officer Association, etc?

1. Yes
2. No
3. No
4. Yes
5. No
6. Yes
7. Yes
8. Yes
9. Yes
10. Yes
11. Yes
12. No





13. Yes
14. Yes
15. Yes
16. Yes
17. Yes
18. Yes
19. Yes
20. Yes

If so, how often do they meet?

1. Monthly
2. <Did not respond>
3. <Did not respond>
4. Every other monthly
5. <Did not respond>
6. Quarterly
7. Quarterly
8. District monthly, council quarterly
9. Monthly
10. Three time per year
11. Monthly
12. <Did not respond>
13. As needed
14. <Did not respond>
15. Monthly
16. Quarterly
17. Monthly
18. Monthly
19. Monthly
20. Monthly

If you have a district function, do you have Venturing Monthly Program Forum or Venturing Roundtable?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Yes
4. Yes
5. Yes
6. Yes
7. Yes
8. Yes
9. Yes
10. Yes
11. Yes

12. No
13. Yes
14. No
15. Yes
16. Yes
17. Yes
18. Yes
19. Yes
20. No

If so, how often do they meet?

1. Bimonthly
2. <Did not respond>
3. Eight time a year
4. Every other month
5. <Did not respond>
6. Monthly
7. Every other month
8. Monthly
9. Bimonthly
10. Three times a year
11. Monthly to quarterly
12. <Did not respond>
13. Monthly
14. <Did not respond>
15. Quarterly
16. Monthly
17. <Did not respond>
18. Monthly
19. Quarterly
20. <Did not respond>

Does your district or council hold Venturing actives or events?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Yes
4. Yes
5. Yes
6. Yes
7. No
8. Yes
9. Yes
10. Yes
11. Yes

- 12. Yes
- 13. Yes
- 14. No
- 15. Yes
- 16. Yes
- 17. Yes
- 18. Yes
- 19. Yes
- 20. Yes

If so, how often?

- 1. Annually
- 2. <Did not respond>
- 3. Annually
- 4. Annually
- 5. Annually
- 6. 3 events a year
- 7. Semiannually
- 8. Bimonthly
- 9. Annually
- 10. Annually
- 11. Monthly
- 12. <Did not respond>
- 13. Quarterly
- 14. <Did not respond>
- 15. Semiannually
- 16. Several times a year
- 17. Two to four times a year
- 18. Bimonthly
- 19. Quarterly
- 20. <Did not respond>