



Open House Planning Guidelines

The intent of this resource is help ‘pull together’ the different elements of Open House. It provides more details on the aspects of the agenda that you may find useful as you determine responsibilities for your Troop’s Open House. These guidelines assume your Troop has already planned your calendar year and budget. These resources (found at www.JoinTheTrail.com) are referenced and may be helpful as you plan:

- *Open House Workbook*
- *Open House Kids Activities*
- *Sample Planning Calendar*
- *Open House Table Signs*
- *Welcome to our Troop!’ Flyer*

Open House is your Troop’s first impression for new families who are looking for more information on Trail Life USA and in most cases are intending to sign up their son that night. While every Troop Open House is different, the goal is the same: Give families attending an exciting, brief overview of your Troop, the Trail Life USA program, answer their key questions, and bring them into the Trail Life USA family! This document will only be useful if you have already completed your Annual Planning and have a Troop Calendar and Budget!

Planning Prior to Open House, you should think through logistics of prospective families. Consider these additional roles and responsibilities for your Open House (please note – these are individuals that may also have a role on the agenda as well):

- **Decorations** – The sky is the limit! Trail Life USA has a strong focus on outdoor adventure, so setting up a mock campsite, kayaks/canoes, lashings, etc. is a great way to set the tone. Additionally, if you have access to a large TV or projector consider having a looping slideshow of the past year’s adventures, if possible.
- **Greeters** – These Youth or Adult Trailmen welcome and direct families from the parking lot to the door, as well as greet them at the door and present them with a **Welcome to our Troop! flyer** and a pen for the parent to write down essential Troop information.
- **Refreshments** – This is optional and subject to Troop’s determination of importance. Coordinating this is a great role for adults that may not have any other duty at Open House and can create a welcoming atmosphere.
- **Kids’ Activities** – This can be one of the most critical, yet easiest elements of an Open House. It will take some coordination and planning, but if well executed will create an ‘A-ha!’ moment with parents that instantly connects them with Trail Life USA. Coordinating this is a great role for current parents and leaders not otherwise on the agenda to help with. Please see the separate document **Open House Kids Activities** at www.JoinTheTrail.com for more details!

Room Setup The sample room setup on the back of the *Open House Workbook* is carefully designed to subtly help make your Open House as successful as possible for several reasons:

- **Flow** – As soon as prospective families come through the door, several things take place:
 - They're warmly greeted and welcomed by a Trailman (preferably in uniform!), who hands them a **'Welcome to our Troop!'** flyer that allows them to capture the key information they need.
 - They're asked to sign in. This ensures that you have their information for follow-up in the case that they don't sign up that night, their information is lost, etc.
 - Directly in their line of sight, they see a display (mock campsite, slideshow, etc) that's eye-catching, draws them in, and showcases your Troop
 - They'll easily see the table they're supposed to sit at, based on grade level. *Greeters should be sure to let parents know they can choose any table if they have boys in different patrols.*
 - A room that's clearly setup makes a great first impression on families!
- **Identity** – It's important to have tables if at all possible and have those tables already divided up by Patrols rather than simply rows of chairs or allowing families to sit anywhere. Here's why:
 - Families will instantly identify with those at their table. They may or may not know who they're sitting with, but these will be the families they're spending the rest of the year with. This allows them to begin fellowshiping right from the start.
 - If you have a Patrol that does not yet have a leader for the year, you'll be able to easily identify the parents for that patrol that may become a prospective leader. Keep in mind that leadership is determined, selected, and approved by the church and Chartered Org Representative so avoid trying to recruit them 'on the spot'.

Agenda While all aspects of Open House are important, having a planned and efficient agenda is the centerpiece and purpose of the event. Generally speaking, a parent who brings their son to Open House has some knowledge of Trail Life USA, is excited, and has a few key questions: *"How much does it cost? Who is our leader? Where do I need to be next week?"* The goal is to make sure we answer these questions well while keeping the meeting as efficient as possible. On the Open House Agenda in the *Open House Workbook*, you might even consider noting the amount of time allowed for each agenda item to keep things on track. This part of your meeting should take **no more** than 30 minutes - 20 minutes is even better!

Below are a few more details on each of the elements found on the agenda. The Flag Ceremony, Prayer, and Oath are an opportunity to demonstrate both the values of Trail Life USA, your Troop, and give families a feel for how meetings are opened on a weekly basis.

- **Flag Ceremony** – Best performed by Trailmen in official or Troop uniform
- **Prayer** – Typically, the Troop Chaplain or a Trailmen.
- **Oath** – Typically a Trailman

- **Dismiss all youth to kids activities** – This can be a crucial ‘deal closer’ for some families. Please see the ***Open House Kids Activities*** for details on how to conduct this element. If you implement this idea, keep in mind that at some point the kids will be back to ‘interrupt’ the agenda.
- **Why Trail Life USA?** – It is recommended to speak both broadly about Trail Life USA (See <http://www.traillifeusa.com/distinctives> for Vision, Mission, Motto, and Statement of Faith), as well as how this applies to your own Troop. *Note – It is important to focus positively on what Trail Life USA is, not strike comparisons to other organizations.*
- **Introduce Leaders** – Ideally, your key leaders are in the room, and sitting at the tables for their respective Patrols. Some leaders may be in another location with children, and that’s ok. Keep introductions brief, but not rushed. Determine ahead of time if leaders will introduce themselves or if the speaker will introduce everyone and have them stand, etc.
- **Distribute Calendar & Cover Highlights** – This is where your Annual Planning will really pay off! Provide a simple, one sheet copy (this [Sample Planning Calendar](#) is an excellent format) to each family, and briefly cover the highlights, both of what you have done in the past year (if applicable), and the exciting things you will be doing this year. This is also where it is appropriate to speak ***briefly*** about fundraising considerations if this is part of your Troop’s plan for funding your program year. The fundraising date(s) should be on your calendar and you can confidently share that there is a supporting budget for the calendar. Financial concerns are a large deciding factor for many families, and they will appreciate having an exciting calendar that also has a reasonable plan to pay for it. This will make a great first impression on families and cause them want to be part of an organized Troop!
- **Emphasize Parent/Son Opportunities** - This dovetails the ‘Why Trail Life USA?’ and the Troop calendar. Parents are looking for opportunities to spend time with their sons, and this is where Trail Life USA offers a unique opportunity – the chance to spend intentional time with your son and fostering Christ-centered values in an exciting setting on a regular basis.
- **Explain Joining Process / Q&A** – This will vary depending on how your Troop is setup. If you have laptops available there, let parents know they can sign up and pay tonight; alternatively, find out if they’d rather have an email sent directly to them to register. Be sure whomever is doing the registering process is familiar with the mechanics of the website, your Open House location has available Internet, etc. Be sure to cover the information they need to fill out on the ***‘Welcome to our Troop!’*** flyer, as this will help ensure they make it back next week!
- **Register Trailmen** – This is a straightforward process. For those ready to register, have them visit the table with the laptops and sign up.
- **Closing** – This might happen before parents begin registering - use your own local Troop tradition. Be sure to invite families to stay around to connect and ask questions if they need to!

You also may decide to add to this agenda, based on your own experience. Feel free to do so, but keep in mind that timing is key – it should take no longer than 30 minutes! Past this point, folks become restless and further presentation might actually work against having a successful Open House.