

## Join the Trail Open House Planning Guidelines

You may find this resource useful as you determine leader's responsibilities for your Troop's Open House. An Open House takes place at the start of each fall—*after* your Troop has planned your program year and budget. These resources are referenced and may be helpful as you plan:

- [Join the Trail Recruiting Guide](#)
- [Open House Kids Activities](#)
- [Open House Table Signs](#)

Your *Join the Trail* 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: to give families an exciting, brief overview of your Troop, and the Trail Life USA program; answer their questions; and bring them into the Trail Life USA family!

*Reminder: holding an Open House will be successful only after you have completed your Annual Planning and have a Troop Calendar and Budget in place!*

**1. Planning** Prior to your Open House, think through the perspective of the families who will attend. Consider these leader responsibilities (note—some may also have a role on the Agenda as well):

- **Decorations** – Boys join for outdoor adventure, so set up a mock campsite, kayaks/canoes, rope lashings, etc. to set the tone. Additionally, if you have access to a large TV screen, play a looping slideshow of the past year's adventures.
- **Greeters** – Trailmen and leaders should welcome and direct families from the parking lot to the door, as well as greet them at the door and hand them Troop informational materials, and a pen for the parent to write down essential Troop information.
- **Refreshments** – Lemonade and cookies. This helps to create a welcoming atmosphere.
- **Kids' Activities** – This will take some coordination and planning, but it will create an "Aha!" moment with parents as they see their sons learning by doing and see Youth Leadership modeled as older Trailmen involve the new boys. See the document above, **Open House Kids Activities** for more details!

**Room Setup** The sample room setup in the [Join the Trail Recruiting Planning Guide](#) is carefully designed to make your Open House as successful as possible:

- **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 parents any Troop onboarding and orientation materials that allows them to capture the key information they need.

- They're asked to sign in. This ensures that you have their phone # and email address for follow-up, in case they don't register while there—and many don't!
- Then they see a display (mock campsite, slideshow, etc.) that's eye-catching, draws them in, and showcases what your Troop does.
- They'll see the table they're supposed to sit at, based on grade level. *Parents can choose a table if they have boys in different grades.*
- A room that's set up well makes a great first impression on families!
- **Identity** – It's important to have tables already divided up by Patrols (grades) rather than simply rows of chairs or allowing families to just 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 connecting in fellowship right from the start.
  - If you have a Patrol that does not yet have enough leaders for the year, you'll be able to easily identify dads at that table who may become a prospective leader. [Keep in mind that leadership is selected and approved by the church and Chartered Org's TML, so don't try to recruit new dads on the spot; but DO get to know them.]

**2. Agenda** Having a planned and efficient Agenda is vital. Generally speaking, parents who bring their sons to an Open House have some knowledge of Trail Life USA, are excited, and have a few key questions, like: “How much does it cost? Who is our leader? Where do I need to be next week?” Make sure you answer these questions in your presentation, keeping the meeting as efficient as possible. Consider noting the amount of time allowed for each agenda item to keep things on track.

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** – Presented by Trailmen in official or Troop uniform
- **Prayer** – By the Troop Chaplain or a Trailman
- **Oath** – 1st Officer or older Trailman
- **Dismiss youth to kid's activities** – Games hosted by older Trailmen (with adult supervision)
- **Why Trail Life USA?** – Speak both broadly about Trail Life USA ([www.trailifeusa.com/distinctives](http://www.trailifeusa.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 make comparisons to Scouts BSA or 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. 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 copy of your annual calendar to each family, and briefly cover the highlights, both of what you have done in the past year, 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 deciding factor for many families, and they will appreciate having an exciting calendar ***and*** a reasonable plan to pay for it. This will make a great first impression on families and cause them to want to be part of an organized Troop!
- **Emphasize Parent/Son Experiences** - 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. Ensure that the person coordinating the registering process is familiar with the mechanics of the website, and that your Open House location has available Internet. Answer any questions they may have and be sure to tell them about your New Parent Orientation meeting where they can learn more about your Troop and ask additional questions that arise between Open House and the first meeting of the year.
- **Register Trailmen** – This is a straightforward process. For those ready to register, have them visit the table with the laptops and sign up on site!
- **Closing (optional)** – It’s up to your Troop how to do this. Be sure to invite families to stay around after/during registration, to connect and ask individual questions.

This whole Agenda should only take 30 minutes! Past this point, folks become restless; adding presentations might detract from your successful Open House. Keep it simple. You are now ready to host your Join the Trail Open House. For more information, head to Trail Life Connect and search Join the Trail.