



Annual Program Planning and Budgeting—Do this with your Troop...and THRIVE!

I. What is this all about?

Trail Life USA's goal is to transform the lives of boys using the tools of fun and adventure. Families who drop out of Trail Life USA will likely do so because they believe their Troop failed to “keep the promise” of providing a full, fun program with lots of trips and outdoor experiences.

So how do you plan a great program? You begin by gathering all of your stakeholders (parents, leaders, and Trailmen) near the end of the summer. When all are gathered, the Troopmaster should open the meeting by explaining “why we’re here”: to make sure your Trailmen get a high-quality, adventure-filled program. They will do that by planning the annual program, and then budgeting for the real costs involved. The Troop Master, Committee Chair and Treasurer should work together on this. All “stakeholders” should know that this is a whole Troop process and decision.

II. Program Planning

Take out a big flip chart (or a laptop with a projection screen if you wish) and start brainstorming. The presenter asks: “What does everyone really want to do this year, starting this fall?”

Attendees will shout out things they want to do as a Troop—one month at a time, starting with September and working through next summer—as you record their suggestions. They will naturally think of camping trips and activities—parades, banquets, holiday gatherings; then you fill in the necessities—recruiting new families (Join The Trail), completing the re-charter, leader training, fundraisers; and buying stuff—uniforms, equipment, Trail badges, handbooks, etc. Your Troop will soon have a full, year-round calendar of activities listed on one big sheet of paper. Thank everyone for taking part. If you have an activity planned, release the boys to do that at this point, but keep the parents in the room.

III. Budgeting

Now you know what the people in your Troop want to do, and you know they'll attend the activities because it's their plan. And you will have added in all of the “required” things as well. Now there's only one issue left to tackle: MONEY! It is time to show the adults the SIZE of the money problem by quickly attaching a cost to each activity. Estimate the number of Trailmen and leaders who will

participate, and estimate the resulting costs. For example, sending 20 Trailmen plus 10 leaders to a weeklong Summer Adventure at \$200 each (including meals and travel) totals \$6,000!

Estimate a total cost for each activity now on the Troop calendar (you won't have time to figure exact #'s at this time— "ball park" figures are good enough, and you should be able to get some good estimates based on previous experiences, or some brief discussion). When you are finished with this exercise, total the costs on the chart...the crowd will be shocked! Many Troops' annual programs will cost \$20,000 or more! Once your initial draft calendar and budget are established, take the time to determine accurate costs for each level of the program—Woodlands Trail, Navigators, and Adventurers.

Now what? Well, here are three ways to fulfill the promise to offer a robust program (but first, decide that breaking the promise altogether and providing a scaled-down, not so fun, less-than-quality program should not be an option):

OPTION #1: Parents pay for everything... either charge a joining/activity fee (hundreds of dollars), or "nickel-and-dime" them to death every time you want to do something and hope they don't notice how much this is costing. Ask: "HOW MANY THINKS THIS IS A GOOD OPTION?" (Hopefully, no one will like this!)

Paying hundreds of dollars each year, whether all at once or throughout the year, is simply not an option for most families. So, ask them: "WOULD YOU RATHER PAY FOR YOUR SON'S YEAR OF ADVENTURE, OR LET YOUR NEIGHBORS DO IT?" (Most will laugh and respond "NEIGHBORS!")

So, fundraising is the key to making this affordable for families. In light of this, which of the remaining options is better? Do you...

OPTION #2: Ask parents to spend two weekends every month doing car washes, bake sales, holiday fundraisers, or fifty other ineffective ways to get enough cash to cover the events. Ask: "HOW MANY THINKS THIS IS A GOOD OPTION?" (This causes burnout. Hopefully, no one will like this plan!)

OPTION #3: Ask families to spend 5-6 total days over a 4-week period focused on one well-executed fundraiser that will cover most of the costs of the program we described. Ask: "NOW, HOW MANY THINK THIS IS A GOOD OPTION?" (Everyone should agree!)

Giving Trailmen one good fundraiser, keeping them focused on it for a few weeks—then leaving fundraising behind, and concentrating on carrying out the fun outdoor program—is clearly the best method.

IV. Fundraising Tips

Check out [Troop Fundraising 101](#) for more information on fundraising. You can also find many tips in the "Annual Troop Fundraising Guide" sent to each Troop yearly and available at Trail Life's online store. Lastly, you can reach out to your Area DSA or Pointman to learn from their fundraising expertise!