



## Open House Planning Guidelines

You may find this resource useful as you determine leaders' 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 Adventure Recruiting Guide](#)
- [Join the Adventure Planning 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!

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

### PLANNING

Prior to your Open House, think through the perspective of the families who will attend. Consider these leader responsibilities (additional responsibilities are listed 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 rotating 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, hand them Troop informational materials, and provide a pen for the parent to write down essential Troop information.
- **Refreshments:** Set out 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 *Open House Kids Activities* linked above for more details!
- **Room Setup:** The sample room setup in the Join the Adventure Planning Guide, linked above, is carefully designed to make your Open House as successful as possible. The guide includes information on:
  - **Flow:** As soon as prospective families come through the door, several things take place:
    - 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 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.

## 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 kids 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.

### Sub-Header

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- Bullet Point 1
- Bullet Point 2
- Bullet Point 3