

Dog Scout Troop Guidebook



FORMING AND MAINTAINING ACTIVE DSA TROOPS

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Dog Scout Troop Guidebook

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Dog Scouts of America
www.dogscouts.org

The Purpose of This Guidebook

The purpose of this guidebook is to introduce you to Dog Scouts of America, its mission, values, vision and its programs and help you understand how troops fit into the goals of DSA. It will outline your responsibilities as a Troop Leader and the expectations DSA has of its troops. The guidebook is meant to give you the basic information you need to share DSA with others. This is only the start of the material available for you. Additional information is available on the extensive DSA website.

The Purpose of a Dog Scout Troop

The purpose of a DSA troop is to bring the Dog Scouts of America mission and goals to the general public. Troops welcome all people and all dogs and give them a safe and positive place to learn and grow. Troop activities should be geared toward learning and increasing the bond people have with their dogs through positive reward based training. Troops should also be a benefit to their local communities through public education, fund-raisers and other community based activities. Troops should help support and promote Dog Scouts of America and must abide by the policies explained in this guidebook.

This guidebook was written with the help of DSA Founder Lonnie Olson, Certification Program Director Chris Puls, members of the DSA Board of Directors and with the help and input of members like you.

Summary of Most Recent Updates

Overview of the updates - August 2011:

The Board of Directors has been hard at work to improve the nationwide Troop program. Our goals for the improvements were to improve communication between DSA and the troops, help troops be more uniform in their policies especially as related to inclusion/exclusion of members, make troop membership more valuable for DSA members and for only active troops to be listed on the DSA website.

The following updates will be in effect for all new troops immediately. Troops that already have a troop number will be expected to be following this policy by December of 2012 (unless otherwise noted). This gives existing troops over a year to institute the policy updates. If an extension is needed on a particular policy it should be requested before Dec 2012.

These updates are explained in more detail within the document as noted. The following is just a brief overview.

Layout:

The layout of the guidebook has been updated to improve the flow of the information and make it more visually appealing.

Troop Leader (& co-leader) requirements: (starting on page 36)

Commitment/understanding: *The following policy updates have been instituted:*

- ♦ *In an effort to reduce the number of troops that start up as soon as a person hears about DSA (but before they fully understand the organization) and then fade just as quickly once the person finds out what is involved*
- ♦ *As a means of ensuring that Troop Leaders use and have an understanding of positive training at least well enough to share that knowledge with others*
- ♦ *To be sure Troop Leaders understand how the badge system works*
- ♦ *To be sure Troop Leaders have shown a commitment to DSA and it's mission so they may share this with their troop members*
- ♦ *To be sure the requirements can be fulfilled by someone located anywhere in the world*
- ♦ *To give DSA staff the opportunity to see and observe potential leaders*
- ♦ *To be sure the troop leader's dog has basic manners and can represent DSA in public*

All DSA Troop Leaders need to earn the Dog Scout badge on (at least) one dog. This can be done by video or in-person or during a DSA camp. The required behaviors must be performed for a DSA certified Scoutmaster and the signed badge form needs to be turned in to DSA with the appropriate fees so that the achievement may be recorded in the DSA database. Questions and/or special considerations regarding this requirement should be directed to the Certification Program Director.

Yahoo group: Troop leaders must be a member of the Troop Leader Yahoo group by Jan 1, 2012, as this will be the way DSA communicates with its Troop Leaders. This list also provides a place for Troop Leaders to ask questions of other troop leaders.

Membership: All troop leaders must maintain their DSA membership.

Skills and qualities: The following skills and qualities are highly recommended in Troop Leaders:

- ◆ Commitment to the mission in words and by example – This means that the Troop Leader has read, understands and is committed to the mission and policies of DSA.
- ◆ People skills – Having the ability to communicate effectively and in a way that doesn't alienate or inflame others. Ability to work with others toward a common goal
- ◆ Organizational skills – the ability to select dates, locations and activities that troop members wish to participate in as a group. The ability to track membership, activities, finances and other information needed for reporting and other needs
- ◆ Leadership skills- This is being able to combine the other three qualities/skills to motivate others to work toward a common goal

Regional Mentors: DSA will be looking for people with good leadership skills and extensive familiarity with DSA to be "Regional Mentors". A mentor will be a person that troop leaders can ask questions of, who will offer help and assistance to troops and who will take troop issues and concerns to the DSA leadership. This will improve communication between the troops and DSA as well as offering troops the help they may need, especially as they are just starting out or if conflicts arise.

Reporting: Troop Leaders (or a person designated by the troop leader) will need to submit an "end of year" report form. This will be a way for DSA to track troop progress, will provide valuable statistics and will help us develop programs that best suit the needs of the troops. The troop may choose to participate in the Troop Recognition Program (explained in detail on the "start a troop" page) or they may instead submit the abbreviated reporting form, which will ask for:

- ◆ Number of members (minimum of 3 participants to remain listed on DSA site)
- ◆ Dates and types of activities the troop has held. Example would be:
 - ◆ 2-1-2011 Troop hike
 - ◆ 5-25-11 Troop meeting
 - ◆ 8-30-11 Swim outing for troop members
 - ◆ 10-25-11 Troop meeting and costume contest
- ◆ Financial info:
 - ◆ For troops that have gone through the process of becoming a recognized non-profit subgroup of DSA, this will be the reporting required by the IRS
 - ◆ For troops that are not non-profit, a submission of income vs. expenses will be required.
- ◆ Dues (see next section)
- ◆ Name, email and phone number of an emergency contact for the troop (see troop policies section immediately below)

Dues: If a troop chooses to charge its members dues, the Troop Leader will need to let DSA know:

- ◆ how much will be charged
- ◆ how are the dues assessed (per person, per household, per activity, etc.)
- ◆ what the funds will be used for
- ◆ Troop Leaders (or the designated person) will need to explain the amount and reason for the dues to prospective troop members before they join.

Troop policies (page 26):

Activity frequency: In order to keep members engaged and feeling like the troop is active, troops need to meet for some sort of activity at least 4 times per year, preferably once per quarter. This allows the members to feel like the troop is active and providing them with valuable, skill building activities.

Emergency Contact: Each troop needs to have a secondary contact person for the troop. This means that

Summary of Most Recent Updates, continued

DSA has that person's name, email and phone number as the "emergency contact" for the troop. This allows us to contact this person if for some reason the Troop Leader stops communicating with DSA for some reason (prolonged illness, death, other). This person would have only the responsibility of letting DSA know if the Troop Leader is no longer able to lead the troop.

Inclusion/exclusion: Troops should have an open door policy and not be excluding people based on age, ability, their dog's behavior, etc. This is explained in much greater detail starting on page 20.

Other updates:

DSA Mission, Values and Vision (page 12): The DSA mission has been updated. Each troop leader should familiarize themselves with the updated mission, Values and Vision as stated in this guidebook.

DSA Laws (page 13-14): The DSA laws have been re-arranged so that an easy to remember acronym can be used, the content has not changed.

In an effort to keep the "List of Troop Locations" page up to date and including only active troops, it is expected that if a troop is unable to maintain these policies, they will notify DSA. This does not necessarily mean they have to dissolve (if membership drops below 3 for example) but that they won't be listed as an active troop until they once again meet the requirements. This will help new DSA members find active troops and reduce the frustration they may feel from trying to contact an inactive troop or a troop leader who is no longer responding to inquiries.

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Definitions

To help you understand the terms used in this guidebook and the roles people have within the organization, these definitions are provided first.

DSA Member: when you pay your DSA dues, you are a member of Dog Scouts of America for 12 months from the date your payment is received. Renewal of your dues is required to continue membership. All Troop Leaders, Scoutmasters, Evaluators and DSA “staff” must maintain current membership.

Cadet Scout: If you agree that you will strive to uphold the Dog Scout Laws and your dog is safe/well managed in public, he or she can get the title of “Cadet Scout” when you pay the \$5 fee for the tag and record keeping. This is generally paid along with your membership, but the membership form can be used to get this title/tag for a member’s dog later, just fill out the needed information.

Dog Scout: Your dog is officially a Dog Scout and can use the letters DSA after his/her name when DSA receives the Dog Scout badge form (and badge fee) that has been signed by a DSA certified Scoutmaster for you and your dog. The Dog Scout title is for the dog only and DSA membership is for the people only.

Jr. Scout is a dog that passed the certification with a juvenile handler (under 18) and submitted the Jr. Scout badge form to DSA (with badge fees) signed by a DSA certified Scoutmaster.

Leaders and Staff of DSA

All of the following positions are done on a VOLUNTEER basis including the DSA “staff” positions. DSA does not have a “central office” where the people holding the following positions all work. The DSA “staff volunteers” are spread out in different parts of the country and can be contacted directly by using the information found on the “Contact Us” page of www.DogScouts.org When contacting these people (who all do their best to answer inquires as quickly as possible), keep in mind that many have full time jobs in addition to their volunteer work for DSA, so sometimes responses may be slightly delayed.

DSA President is the person that oversees the entire organization with the help of others who have organizational roles. The President serves as the liaison between the Board of Directors and other DSA department heads but does not have a voting position on the board.

DSA Board of Directors is the group of DSA members that create, set and enforce policies, ensure the direction of the organization and use their individual skills and talents to improve and grow the organization. When vacancies open, new board members are selected from applications received from current DSA members and voted in by the current board members. The board works closely with several improvement committees that welcome new members.

Certification Program Director (CPD) – This person (with the help of his/her volunteers) oversees all of the Troop Leaders, Scoutmasters and Evaluators. This person also oversees the video certification process by reviewing the videos and answering any questions about the program. This person is the contact for Regional Troop Mentors.

Regional Troop Mentor- This is a person with excellent people skills and comprehensive understanding of the DSA program. This person is the liaison between troop leaders and DSA staff. He or she is in charge of the troops within a certain geographical region, can help answer questions, collects end of year reports from the troops in their region and can assist with dispute resolution. If you would like to be a mentor, please contact the Certification Program Director.

Membership Director – processes the membership applications/fees and maintains the DSA membership database.

Recognition Program Director handles all the record keeping for and distribution of the merit badges

Director of Competition and Titling oversees the competition and titling division of DSA. This person works closely with the administrators of the various competition divisions.

DSA Treasurer – handles all the funds for DSA that come in through the other departments and accepts donations made to DSA such as memorial donations.

Memorial and Engraving Program Director - handles the plaques and awards given to members and other special people who are recognized by DSA. This person also donates the “Rainbow Bridge Troop” plaques and keeps them up to date to honor all the Dog Scouts that have passed away. If a member’s Dog Scout attended Dog Scout camp in MI, they should notify the Director of the dog’s name, date of birth and date of death so a memorial plaque can be added to the Rainbow Bridge memorial at camp.

Newsletter Editor – this person has the task of creating the DSA newsletter (with the help of contributions by members, leaders and others). Troops should submit “troop scoop” news directly to the editor (please honor submission deadlines and rules). Members should notify the editor if they wish a memorial to be included.

Graphic Arts Designer – helps create the images for DSA T-shirts, promotional material, sunshine cards and does the layout for the DSA calendar

Webmaster- has the task of keeping the website up to date and adding new information about the growing and improving organization

Troop leader is just that: A leader of a troop. This person may or may not have other titles within DSA depending on their personal goals and motivations.

Scoutmaster is a person that is certified by DSA to observe (in person only) and certify dogs and handlers that want to get their Dog Scout title. A person has a specific and intensive process to go through to become certified to give the tests for the Dog Scout badge/title. This person may or may not have other titles within DSA.

Dog Scout Evaluator evaluates dogs (in person only) that are already Dog Scouts as they try for the specialty badges. A person has a specific and intensive process to go through to become certified to give the tests for each specialty badge. The Dog Scout evaluator may or may not have other titles within DSA.

Scoutmaster Trainer is a person certified by DSA to convey the title of Scoutmaster on another individual on behalf of DSA. This person may also certify Dog Scouts by video.

Evaluator Trainer is a person certified by DSA to convey the title of Evaluator for one or more specialty badges on another individual on behalf of DSA. This person may also certify dogs for certain specialty badges by video.

Dog Scout Camp Staff – This group of people makes sure the campers have a great time at camp and learn as much as possible while having great fun!

Parent – Occasionally, you will see DSA use of the term “parent” to describe the dog’s handler, owner, caretaker, etc. because DSA defines parent as: A person who raises, nurtures, loves, provides for, teaches and protects a younger being so that he or she can become a welcome and productive member of society. This comprises all the tasks involved in raising a youngster to be an independent adult. Parenting begins even before the youngster is born or adopted, it is a part of the relationship within a family and it is something that lasts a lifetime.

Definitions, continued

Many people who share their lives with dogs have the same level of bond with their dogs as most people have with their human children. While we recognize that as far as the law is concerned, dogs are considered property, (which is why we mostly use the term “owner”) we feel the relationship is much greater than that of object and property owner. Raising and owning a dog responsibly involves parenting.

Section One: Understanding the DSA Mission





Dog Scouts of America's Mission, Values, and Vision

Dog Scouts of America Mission

To improve the lives of dogs, their owners, and society through humane education, positive training, and community involvement.

DSA Values: What We Stand For

We stand for responsibility – to the dogs in our care, to our communities, and to each other. We recognize the importance and benefits of the relationship between people and companion animals, and seek out ways to enrich this bond. We believe encouraging compassion and kindness toward our canine companions builds a more compassionate and kind world. We strive to create a better understanding and quality of life for our dogs and all animals in our world.

We believe that our members make a difference by setting an example, developing skills and embracing opportunities to share our philosophy with each other and inspire people to join us. We know that sharing positive ways of training and problem-solving helps to keep dogs in lifetime homes and out of shelters.

In Dog Scouts, people help dogs, dogs help people, and the whole community benefits

DSA Vision

We envision a future where dogs remain in happy, lifelong homes with responsible owners. In this vision, all dogs are seen as a useful and welcome part of the community, because people take responsibility for socializing, training, containing, and caring for them. We strive to create a world where people view their dogs as part of their family and all dog owners have the knowledge they need to raise well-mannered canine citizens.

In a Nutshell:

One way to briefly explain Dog Scouts of America is to use the following “tagline” - feel free to use it on your troop’s promotional materials, or when talking to groups about DSA.



Dog Scouts of America

***Learning New Things,
Serving Our Communities,
Enriching the Lives of People and Dogs.***

About the Dog Scout Laws

The Dog Scout Laws are rules for responsible ownership of a dog. All DSA members should strive to uphold these laws and anyone who wishes to earn the title of Dog Scout on their dog should be able to explain the laws.

As a way to remember what the laws cover, the acronym “ACT RESP BC” (Act Responsibly Because) was developed. This stands for the following items that are explained in more detail below:

- * **A**ware
- * **C**lean
- * **T**ravel-ready

- * **R**epresentative
- * **E**xemplary
- * **S**afe
- * **P**arent/Teacher

- * **B**ehaved
- * **C**ared for

All members of Dog Scouts of America are expected to strive to uphold these laws. If there are any that the dog or human is not yet ready to uphold, the owner should be working toward helping the dog learn the skills he or she needs or be getting the supplies, equipment or education needed.

In your role as a troop leader, you will be helping others to learn the skills they need with the help of the educational materials provided and recommended by DSA. These laws provide an excellent base of educational material you can share with your troop members and the public.

Please see the Dog Scout Laws on the following page.

The Dog Scout Laws

Aware (of your dog)

1. My dog should never be tied up and left unattended. I understand that I am unable to protect my dog from harm if he or she is tied in place where people and animals can harass him or her. I also understand that attaching a dog to a fixed object can cause location guarding and increase the chances of a person being bitten. I promise to never leave my dog in a vehicle unattended if there is any chance he or she could get hot, cold or be harassed or injured by humans or other animals

Clean

2. My dog should not be allowed to eliminate in an unseemly manner. I will refrain from letting my dog urinate on buildings, statues or other people's things, and I promise to always carry plastic bags and clean-up supplies to pick-up fecal matter. In an effort to reduce the negative impact of irresponsible dog parents, I will make attempts to educate, provide clean-up bags to and clean-up dog waste left by those less educated in responsible dog parenting.

Travel-ready

3. I will strive to travel safely with my dog contained in a crate that is attached to the vehicle or in an accident rated seatbelt designed for dogs. This will help keep the dog safe during travel, will reduce the distractions I have while driving and could save my dogs life in an accident.

Representative (of responsibility and other Dog Scouts)

4. I must obey leash laws and other rules when accompanying my dog to a park, business or other place where dogs are allowed. In an effort to reduce the number of places that refuse admittance to dogs, I will not let my dog be a nuisance and will keep my dog under control at all times. I will not allow my dog to harass wildlife. I will be familiar with and obey any laws regarding my dog such as license requirements, travel safety and vaccination documentation. I will not represent my Dog Scout in a way that will mislead the public regarding his or her right to accompany me in public places.

Exemplary

5. I will strive to live by the Dog Scout Parent's motto: "Our dog's lives are much shorter than our own, let's help them enjoy their time with us as much as we can." I will help my dog uphold the Dog Scout motto: "Let us learn all that we can, so that we may become more helpful"

Safe

6. My dog must be safe with people and other dogs. I will always be courteous when I am with my dog in public. We will set good examples of a responsible parent and a well-trained dog. I will socialize my puppy and continue the socialization through out his or her life so that he or she will not fear novel stimuli, strange people or new dogs.

Parent/Teacher

7. I will always show kindness and caring toward my dog, so that others can observe the joys of responsible and loving dog parenting and appreciate the bond between my well-behaved dog and myself.

8. My dog should be helpful whenever he or she can be and I will utilize my dog's skills to allow the dog to assist with certain tasks and become more helpful. I promise to have my dog learn all that he or she can.

Behaved

9. My dog must be well mannered, so that he or she will be accepted in public places. I understand and accept responsibility for teaching my dog proper manners using non-abusive methods like positive reinforcement training.

Cared for

10. I will provide basic care for my dog. I will strive to feed my dog the best food I can afford and to educate myself about why some dog foods are better than others. I understand that keeping my dog at an optimum weight will reduce the chances of disease and injury. I will provide the maintenance that my dog needs to be healthy and comfortable. I will keep my dog clean and well groomed, including nail trimming. I will make my dog a member of the family and not subject him or her to living alone outside full time. I will create at least a basic emergency care plan for my dog in case I am hurt or otherwise unable to care for my dog. My dog will always have some form of identification.



The “Dog Scout Way”

The Dog Scout Way encompasses so much and illustrates that there is so much to be learned about dog behavior and training! It is the basis of the “the smart end of the leash” concept that embraces learning all that you can about your dog and helping your dog feel safe and helping him learn all that he can so that your dog is a welcome (and even productive) member of society.



The following is from parting comments given during the closing ceremony of a Dog Scout Camp, summarizing “The Dog Scout Way”:

As a Dog Scout owner, I hope we have shown you how to be the “thinking” end of the leash. You give your dog the attention and protection he deserves, and you are not afraid to tell another person to get his or her dog back from your dog. You handle all situations so that your dog doesn’t have to. That’s the covenant you have with your dog. You are aware of the environment and the changing situations around your dog. You know your dog well enough to know what types of situations will make your dog nervous. You do everything you can to manage, control or avoid those types of situations. When your dog sees that he or she no longer has to be ‘on guard’ for developing situations (because you have taken on that job), the dog will be able to relax more and will be less reactive.

You have learned to have your dog look at you on cue, which alone can get you out of potentially sticky situations. When your dog is looking at you, they are not making direct eye contact with another dog (a threat in dog language.) It also appears to other dogs as if your dog is ‘looking away’ which is a calming signal that will help other dogs around you be less reactive toward your dog. A dog that is paying attention to you is not ‘surfing the environment’ for better and more interesting things. He knows that you are the giver of wonderful things and that his good behavior is what gets him access to the smells, sights and interaction in the environment. By making the dog responsible for his own behavior management, you have to do less asking for good behavior (“sit, don’t pull, leave it, don’t jump on that” etc.), which gives you more time to just enjoy your dog and be proud of how smart he or she is. Because the dog has learned that not pulling on the leash gets him forward movement and greeting people by sitting in front of them brings on more attention.

You know how to conduct yourself in public. You are a good representative of a responsible dog owner. You clean up any messes your dog leaves behind (feces, urine, vomit, hair, half chewed rawhides, etc.) so that you will not be the cause of a ban on dogs (in a hotel, park, or other public place.) You obey all laws and rules regarding your dog and keep him or her on leash or under excellent verbal control to keep your dog safe. You don’t allow your dog to harass people or interfere with their right to enjoy a public place. You set a good example that shows the joys of the human-canine bond. Your dog is under control and well behaved, showing people what is possible with positive training. You know that if we, as dog owners, are to keep from losing any more privileges, we must act responsibly, and must lead by example in our communities. We must always pick up our own dog’s messes, and when possible, pick up a few extras to keep dog owners from getting a bad reputation because of a few irresponsible people.

You treat your dog with kindness, knowing that while he or she may not be “perfect,” your dog is PERFECT at being a dog. Unlike Pinocchio, your dog will not magically wake up one morning a “real boy.” He will always be a dog, and we, as owners, have to respect the differences in our species. You have taken it upon yourself to learn as much as possible about those differences and how to bridge the communication gaps.

You know that punishment creates fear, and no learning can take place where there is fear. Your dog is not afraid to offer behaviors, worried that he might be “wrong” and get punished. I hope you both have learned that “wrong” is not “bad,” it is only information, and nothing to be afraid of. If incorrect behavior does not get rewarded, it makes the correct behavior (that does get rewarded) more clear to the dog. Punishment is not needed for the dog to understand when he has made the ‘wrong’ choice.

I hope you also realize that being wrong is just feedback from your universe, and that success can often be a 1,000-step process, with many wrong answers and dead-ends along the way. When Thomas Edison created the light bulb, it is said that he had 1,000 trials that ended in no light bulb. A reporter asked him if he felt like a failure because he had ‘failed’ 1,000 times. Edison replied that he was not a failure, he created the light bulb, it was just a 1,000 step process. Don’t be discouraged if a behavior you want to teach your dog becomes a 1,000 step process, there is a light at the end of that tunnel and the more the dog learns, the better he or she will be at learning. As a dog trainer, you must have a lot of patience and be willing to keep trying, even when you are not seeing instant results.



You realize that dogs will work better for positive reinforcement, and that the problem with punishment training is that you must always have the threat of punishment looming over your dog’s head to get him to perform. He will never do what you ask because he “wants” to -- he is only performing to escape an aversive. You also know that punishment inhibits ALL behaviors, so if you punish for one behavior, the dog will be afraid to perform any behaviors for fear it will result in punishment. You know that for this reason, crossover dogs will take longer to learn to trust that you will not punish them. (Note- crossover dogs are dogs that started their training with a punishment based training method, but now have a trainer that uses all positive training.)

Knowing what you now know, we hope you will go home with this information and “spread it like wildfire”, starting a spark in everyone you meet to learn more about responsible dog ownership and positive training methods. Like a pebble dropping into the water, the ripples reach out far from the original point of entry. We hope you will become involved in community service and public education in the communities where you live, because you WILL have an impact on those around you, even if it is just by letting people observe the joy of having a well-mannered dog and being a responsible owner. That is the Dog Scout Way.



Section Two: Your Role in DSA and Starting a Troop



Troop leaders are...

- T** Teachers who are able to guide members in the Dog Scout Way
- R** Realistic, Responsible, and Respectful of all living things
- O** Organized, inventive and creative
- O** Outgoing, able to communicate to others and increase membership
- P** Professional, People Persons. Able to relate to others in a diverse group of individuals

- L** Leaders that can motivate others toward a common goal
- E** Express patience, compassion, and tolerance to others
- A** Ambitious, encouraging others' success through troop activities
- D** Dog lovers that want the best for ALL dogs
- E** Excellent communicators eager to share DSA with others
- R** Role models, representing DSA positively in both word and action

Your role as a troop leader

As a DSA Troop Leader, you will be expected to:

- ◆ Have an understanding of (and be able to explain to others) positive reward training methods and be willing to increase your knowledge about training, behavior and teaching others
- ◆ Have a desire to teach others and help them learn new skills
- ◆ Always approach interactions with others with a cheerful and positive attitude
- ◆ Host at least 4 educational meetings or events per year
- ◆ Use only methods endorsed by DSA as outlined in DSA's Position on Punishment when working with your own dog and with troop member's dogs http://www.dogscouts.org/Position_on_punishment.html
- ◆ Do all that you can to help support, promote and grow Dog Scouts of America
- ◆ Welcome anyone into your troop and be willing to include them in as many troop activities as possible. No one should be denied membership in the troop based on race, religion, political views, age, sexual orientation, ability or any other reason. See info below on how to include people that have dogs with social issues and the "FAQ" section for dealing with "people issues".

As a troop leader, you are an ambassador of DSA and expected to promote and use reward based (positive reinforcement) training methods, and to help people in your troop be better owners/trainers for their dog(s) through education about responsibility and a better understanding of dog behavior and dog training.

Goals of a Troop

In order to achieve success, it is helpful to know where your efforts should be leading. DSA offers helpful

guidelines, but gives leaders the empowerment to achieve the goals in their own way. As long as training and interactions are reward-based and not for profit or personal gain or to promote a certain business, and don't exclude anyone, leaders and their troop members have some leeway in how their troop should be run, how active it will be (meeting at least the minimum troop requirements) and what activities interest them.

Ideally, you want to work toward growing a troop that has many active members and that offers those members a variety of frequent activities. All troop functions should use and promote reward based learning- reward based training for the dogs and if possible, TAG (teaching with acoustical guidance) for people (applying clicker training to humans.) People learn and bond more readily when they get recognition and occasional rewards (when they feel they are "benefitting" from the functions and are having fun.)

The troop should have camaraderie among its members, which can come from encouraging positive interactions and encouraging participation in fun and/or educational and team building type activities. The more that the troop members get together, the more opportunity they have to get to know each other and become friends. This will encourage more participation and better attendance at troop functions. Encouraging troop members to take an active role in the running of the troop also helps create a feeling that they have some input in the troop and that it's "their" troop as opposed to "the" troop.

Troops should strive to be of benefit to their community through fundraisers, educational offerings, therapy visits and other programs that help groups within the community. This is a large part of what DSA does and why it is so much more than just a "fun dog club". Fundraisers that directly help dogs in the community and education of the public about responsible dog care and humane training make a huge impact on the lives of dogs and their people in your area. Troops should also strive to help support DSA and its many educational programs whenever possible so that DSA can continue to support its troops and the nation.

If you keep these goals in mind as you make decisions affecting the troop that you are starting or running, you'll be well on your way to having a successful troop!

Keep in mind that you may be the first contact someone has with the DSA organization, so you should become as familiar with DSA as possible (and all that it has to offer). Use the knowledge you gain as a resource that people can use to further their own education.

The more irresponsible dog owners we can help become responsible dog owners, the better their dogs lives will be. It is also more likely that, because of the bond they develop with their dog, the dog won't be turned over to a shelter or rescue or set loose to fend for himself. With education, more people will be likely to make informed decisions about spay/neuter of their dogs and/or learn how to properly contain and care for their intact dogs. This will help end the needless deaths that are taking place in shelters across the country due to over-population and "accidental litters".

Your willingness and ability to help people become better dog owners WILL have an impact on at least that person and that dog, but will probably be more far reaching than you will know, because they are likely to share that new knowledge with others.

Please understand that we don't expect leaders to do it all alone. From the beginning of your troop formation, stress to the members that their help will be needed if the troop is expected to grow and be able to do more activities. Encourage your troop members to take on various roles to help the troop succeed (and help you avoid burn out.) Troop members can help you with event organization (picking events, locations, speakers, etc.), with membership tracking, with finance management, and much more. They should each be getting the word out about the troop by telling their friends and others they meet. Encourage members to bring their friends to a meeting or event. This generates new members that bring in additional skills, new ideas and can possibly offer additional help where needed. A troop should not be a "one man (or woman) show", it should be a collaborative effort.

Helping dogs with issues

Many DSA leaders have felt they have gained valuable knowledge and skills because of their role as a Troop Leader. They may have started with just the very basic understanding of positive training and over time, have

developed into very accomplished trainers and teachers. Working with many different people that you come to know as close friends and their different dogs will encourage you to develop new skills each time a new situation presents itself. This is because each person and dog will present you with a new learning opportunity.

As a DSA troop leader you should be striving to educate yourself as much as possible about responsible dog ownership, positive, reward-based dog training, canine behavior and people teaching skills. Then be willing to share that knowledge with as many people as possible with the help of your troop members and leadership team. It is also helpful to develop a list of trainers in your area that use the methods endorsed by DSA. If a person presents a problem that you feel is above your head, you can refer him/her to these trainers.

A troop should strive to have well mannered dogs with responsible owners, but that is not where most people start. Dogs with owners that don't yet understand positive training, dogs that need to learn manners, dog that have social issues, etc. are all welcome to join and learn and improve their skills. The members of the troop that have achieved the "well mannered dog" goal should be willing to help others learn how to get there. The troop leader and established members can set the tone for troop membership. This "tone" should make new members feel welcome. It should be a positive and educational atmosphere. Members should be willing and open to helping other members that have not yet learned all the wonderful, positive training techniques they have mastered. It can be educational and rewarding to see the transformation of the dog and handler!

Resources: You should also have a list of resources you can give the owners. The Dog Scout website has loads of helpful information on the articles page. Some helpful books are: "Click to Calm" by Emma Parsons, "Control Unleashed" by Leslie McDevitt, "Feisty Fido" by Patricia McConnell and "The Culture Clash" by Jean Donaldson. The Culture Clash is a great book for ANY dog owner to read and if you haven't read it, please do. The Functional Rewards website and Yahoo group is another great resource and support group for the owners of reactive dogs: <http://functionalrewards.com/> If the dog is fearful, then you can recommend www.fearfuldogs.com

Welcome all humans: Just because a person's dog might not be ready to handle the environment of a troop meeting or a public function does not mean the person is also excluded from these activities. Just the opposite! You should encourage them to attend, to observe and help others during training sessions and to take

Dog Scouts of America was built upon inclusiveness, where we reach out to others, and strive for every dog and person to participate as fully as possible. While not every activity is suitable for every dog or every person, if you keep this inclusive spirit in mind whenever you are making decisions and troop policies you'll carry on this welcoming tradition of outreach. This inclusive spirit will guide your troop toward creative ways of helping others in your troop, and in your community, and help spread The Dog Scout Way to as many people and dogs as possible.

what they learn and apply it to their interactions with their own dog. If the troop member is working with a trainer from your referral list, encourage the member to share what they have learned and how the troop members can help them further their dog's training. This helps educate everyone about how to help a dog that is not as comfortable in certain situations as others and everyone benefits from that.

Dogs representing DSA: All members of DSA represent the national organization while in the public - DSA expects members to be good ambassadors of the organization through their presence and actions. It is important to always consider, first and foremost, the comfort of each troop dog in attendance, the public's safety, and the perception you're portraying of DSA while representing DSA at public events. It is expected that only dogs that have shown you an ability to be comfortable in public and that are well mannered/managed will be representing your troop and Dog Scouts of America during PUBLIC functions like booth events and parades. But there are plenty of other opportunities for the dogs that have not yet reached that level of training. They should be welcome at get-togethers held for troop members (meetings, parties, training days, hikes, etc.). For the dogs not yet able to handle these types of events, the owners are still welcome to attend without their dog

to learn new skills that can help them with their dog.

Hikes are great activities: On leash walks and hikes in local parks are excellent activities for dogs with reaction issues because all the dogs are focused ahead and moving in the same direction. By having the reactive dog follow behind the other dogs, it gets to observe and smell them from a distance that it feels is safe. Repeatedly having positive, non-threatening encounters with other dogs helps the reactive dog to relax and will help them get to know and trust the other dogs it sees repeatedly. Gradually the distance from the other dogs can be reduced.

Visual barriers and other aides: It may help to give the dog his own space to retreat to by setting up a visual barrier like an X-pen with a sheet over it or the lightweight, versatile barriers created in the video on this page: <http://www.posidog.com/barriers/>

“The Normal Dog Myth”: It is actually “abnormal” behavior for a canine to love every stranger and every other dog. Read this article by KPA certified trainer Casey Lomonaco for more info on that: <http://blogs.dogster.com/dog-training/the-myth-of-normal-dogs/2010/11/> We don’t expect ourselves or other humans to love every other human, but for some reason, some people hold their dogs to a higher standard. We can often help the dog learn the abnormal social behavior through early socialization and the luck of genetics that allow the dog to be social and comfortable in new situations. But not everyone is blessed with an “easy” and social dog. DSA camps, troops and members have made amazing transformations in the lives of people that have dogs with behavioral “issues” and that knowledge sharing and training help is a foundation of DSA.

Education of the troop members and a few common sense rules can allow all dogs to enjoy a troop meeting, hike or other activity.

You might suggest the person have the dog wear two collars/leashes just in case one breaks. Often it is helpful to the dog if one leash is attached on the chest ring of a “V” front harness or to a head collar, while the back-up leash is attached to a flat or martingale collar. A harness (or head collar) removes pressure on the dog’s neck that can increase a dog’s agitation or arousal level. [Note: dogs should be desensitized to the head halter properly, and as with all training equipment not all tools are appropriate for every dog and each must be used properly for the dog’s safety and well-being.] The leash being attached to the harness at the dog’s chest helps give the handler greater control of the dog.

If there is something solid in the area, the back-up line could run from the harness to the solid object. This line should be kept loose and is only a safety in case the dog pulls loose from its handler or the main leash or collar break. The dog should never be left without a handler while tied.

A designated distance that allows the dog to remain calm may be all the dog needs, or it might be added to the other aides listed. Often it is helpful to the other attendees if the “distance line” is visual (like a long line on the floor or a low barrier) so they know how close they can get. Knowing others will respect this distance allows the reactive dog’s handler to relax a bit, and that helps the dog relax. The goal, of course, is to work on reducing the distance that others have to be from the reactive dog. But that can take time.

An additional handler can also help in some cases. The second handler can hold the back-up leash, help with training (do the clicking or treat delivery) and offer support and an extra set of eyes for the handler. It is highly recommended that the owner of a reactive dog not have additional dogs with them, unless they have proven the ability to give each dog the attention and supervision it needs to prevent fearful or defensive reactions. If one dog is friendly, while the other is reactive, the friendly dog should not be allowed to go unsupervised to do as he/she pleases while the owner works with the reactive dog. But if the reactivity is well managed and doesn’t require too much vigilance from the owner, two dogs may be fine. This will be a judgment call for the troop leader and owner to work out with the goal being what is best for the dogs (and the

other troop member's dogs).

Muzzles: The use of a muzzle is allowed, but should be a design that is comfortable and safe for the dog to wear for a duration of time, such as a "basket muzzle" that allows the dog to open its mouth. A muzzle is not required if other means of safety are preferred (like those listed above).

A properly sized muzzle can be a great safety tool, but it needs to be introduced to the dog properly:

- ◆ The sight of the muzzle should mean the treats will be delivered, one right after another. When the muzzle is removed from view the treat flow stops. Repeat this a few times until the dog WANTS the muzzle to appear. This is a very important step, because it sets how the dog FEELS about the muzzle. If the dog wants to sniff it, by all means let him check it out. For dogs that already have a really bad feeling about muzzles, try putting the muzzle on a chair or low table instead of holding it in your hand. Or set it on the floor during meal times at a distance the dog can handle until the dog is able to eat right next to it. Changing the type of muzzle so it looks different may also help.
- ◆ Gradually hold it closer to the dog's face as the treats are delivered. Watch for the dog moving away, putting his ears back, the dog's body going stiff or the dog taking treats roughly as these are signs the muzzle has gotten too close too fast.
- ◆ Once the dog's face can be touched by the muzzle with the dog remaining calm, you can try dropping the treat into the muzzle to see if the dog will stick his nose in to get it. Let it be the dog's choice to move closer to get the food out - don't move the muzzle toward the dog. Repeat this multiple times. If the dog is unsure about putting his nose in, you might want to try smearing peanut butter or baby food from the outer edge to the deepest point. The dog can gradually work his way in. Putting the muzzle on the floor (so it's not in your hand) may also help the dog gain confidence.
- ◆ When the dog is eagerly jamming his own nose deep into the muzzle to get the treat while it's in your hand, you are ready to start moving the straps.
- ◆ At first, only move them a bit to see what the dog's reaction will be. If he's busy getting the food out of the muzzle he probably won't notice. If he's ok with that, hold the straps in place for ½ second before releasing and removing the muzzle. Repeat a few times.
- ◆ This is where it helps if you have a basket type muzzle through which you can give the dog treats. You'll want to hold the straps for just a little bit longer. At first, the muzzle will come off as soon as the dog is finished eating the treat, but gradually leave it on just a bit longer with the straps held in place.
- ◆ If the dog shows no signs of being upset by this, increase the time and start feeding the dog through the muzzle while it's on. Once you take it off don't deliver treats. The dog should WANT the muzzle on, because that's where the treats happen.
- ◆ When you are able to hold it in place for the amount of time it will take you to fasten and unfasten the muzzle, you can start to fasten it for very brief periods of time. Build the duration little by little.
- ◆ When the dog can calmly wear the muzzle while stationary for about 60 seconds with occasional rewards, hold a treat a little to the side so the dog has to move a foot to reach it. This is the start of having the dog learn he can move his feet while wearing a muzzle. Repeat to each side several times.
- ◆ Increase the distance the dog has to move to get the treat little by little. Before you know it, your dog will willingly stick his nose into the muzzle and happily wear it while moving around and performing known behaviors as if it was just another collar. THEN you are ready to use it in your training protocol.

This video is a good demo of the steps you can take: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1FABgZTFvHo> However, the step of clipping it loose around the dog's neck could go badly if the dog spooks at it and can't get away from it.

This site has 3 different methods near the bottom of the page, including 2 ways to work with dangerous dogs: http://www.lincolnlac.com/site/view/187520_TrainingforProblemBehaviors.pml

Remember, a muzzle is only a temporary piece of safety equipment for training. It is not intended that the dog wear the muzzle every waking moment. It also should not be used to overwhelm the dog with situations he would not otherwise be ready to accept. It is to be used to prevent an accidental bite if something unexpected should happen, like a broken leash or a loose dog rushing up. Also be aware that some dogs are adept at getting their muzzles off or the muzzle/strap might get caught on something and come off. This is why the

muzzle should only be used as emergency safety equipment and not to put the dog in situations he would not be ready to handle without it.

Colored Bandana System

Helping the troop members understand that the reactive dogs are uncomfortable or frightened and need a bit of extra space around them can help the reactive dog make strides in their ability to learn how to be more comfortable and less reactive. As a means of helping owners communicate their dog's needs, DSA has developed a bandana system that your troop can use to let others know if their dog needs more space.

A Yellow Bandana means the dog is uncomfortable with other dogs in its space. This could encompass everything from the dog that gives a grrr when being mauled by the happy greeting of an over-exuberant puppy, to the dog who feels his life is in danger if another dog gets too close. Of course it's the owner of the over exuberant puppy that needs more information on how to teach their puppy proper greeting manners, but that's another topic.

Distance and respect: It is common courtesy (and a good rule to practice where ever you go) to not let your dog get into the space of another dog without the owner's permission (maintain a distance of about the length of your arm or more between the dogs). By asking if it's ok for your dog to greet another dog BEFORE they get within greeting range, you will know if it's a good idea for your dog to proceed or not. It also ensures that both owners are watching their dog during the interaction.

But this may be a difficult concept for the owners of those "easy" and social dogs to understand. Their dog seems to love all dogs and so they let their dog go do greetings whenever he desires. This leaves the dog on his own to work out the body language and signals the other dog might be giving. If their dog gets barked or growled at, the owner looks down on the reactive dog as mean or dangerous, when in fact it was their own dog that was being rude (by not respecting the "back off" signals the dog was giving before the bark or growl).

The reactive dog simply might not tolerate the advances of an overly friendly dog that doesn't respect canine greeting rituals. Or maybe the dog has been attacked by another dog or missed out on proper socialization and is now defensive when approached by an unknown dog. These dogs are not bad or mean- they are afraid. They have learned that barking and looking fierce gets that other scary dog away (and it always works). Because it works, it is a behavior that is getting rewarded; it gets the dog what he wants, so it gets repeated. And without helping the dog feel more comfortable around other dogs, the behavior often gets worse and the dog's "safety bubble" gets bigger, so the reactions start earlier.

What to do: The handler of the reactive dog needs to learn to recognize the first signs of unease their dog shows and help the dog feel more. This could include increasing distance from the other dog, asking the owner of the other dog to move their dog back and/or watching for an acceptable behavior/response that can

By explaining to all your troop members the meaning of the yellow bandana, it acts as a reminder to watch what their own dog is doing and who they are going up to (which they should be doing even if no yellow bandana dogs are present).

rewarded. The books mentioned above (Click to Calm and Control Unleashed) and the Functional Rewards program go into a lot more detail about what a handler can do to help their dog be less reactive using rewards. As a troop leader, it is recommended that you familiarize yourself with these programs so you can assist the owners during private troop functions.

A rainbow colored bandana means the dog is not comfortable with people it doesn't know well. It might be a dog that has been beaten by strangers, missed the early socialization with people or that has a bad associa-

Sample/Suggested Troop Event Rules

In an effort to further education and keep meetings and troop events safe, the following is a list of rules your troop can adopt. These rules were suggested by current troop leaders, based on rules they have found useful. You do not have to use all of these if you find that they are not needed within your group. Modifications to these rules can be made if the rules are made to help people and dogs feel more comfortable/safe and if the rules follow the other policies outlined in this guidebook.

- ◆ Dogs must have current vaccinations or titers on file with the troop leader to participate in troop activities. Some troops only require proof of rabies vaccination.
- ◆ Everyone is responsible for their own actions and the actions of their own dog(s) or any dog they are holding (in their arms or by the leash/collar). If your dog (or a dog you have been put in charge of) pees inside or leaves a pile anywhere, you should be watching them closely enough that you will see this and it is your responsibility to clean it up. If you see someone else's dog depositing anything they shouldn't, please point it out to the handler. Everyone should have clean-up bags with them and deposit full bags in the designated container.
- ◆ Dogs with any issues (fear, possessiveness, space issues, etc.) should wear a yellow bandana as a reminder to others that your dog needs more space BUT it is **still your responsibility** to keep your dog out of trouble! If you need to, simply remind approaching owners of their need to "please keep your dog back". If your dog gets too riled, you might need to step out till he/she can regain composure and let the adrenaline subside before coming back into the meeting space.
- ◆ Watch your own dog at all times for signs of stress and so you know where your dog is looking and going. If your dog gets barked at, it may have been staring at another dog (a challenge to "rumble" in dog language) or it may have invaded the space of another dog that has a bigger bubble of comfort zone.
- ◆ Do not let your dog approach another dog unless that dog's owner says it's ok. If given the ok to greet, remember that a doggie greeting should last about as long as a human handshake (3 seconds max.) and after that amount of time, both handlers should call their dog out of the greeting. Dogs have very capable noses and don't need more than a few seconds to gather information about another dog. If the greeting goes on too long, dogs can get just as uneasy about it as humans get with a handshake that goes on too long. By keeping the greeting brief, it prevents it from going into "in-depth exam" mode. If your dog is really exuberant about greetings, do walk-bys or lead/follow walking instead (or prior to) contact.
- ◆ Greetings should only be between 2 dogs at a time. If a handler has more than 1 dog, they should not both be allowed to go up to another dog at the same time. This can make the other dog feel defensive (it can't protect front and back at the same time) and it's not fair to the single dog.
- ◆ Handlers should not have more than 2 dogs with them at a troop event. It's too hard to watch more than 2 dogs and if one dog gets into trouble, the handler is at a disadvantage. If the handler feels additional dogs must attend, they need to bring additional competent handlers to hold and be responsible for their extra dogs. Or bring crates or other means of safe containment. Dogs should never be tied to something as a means of "containing" the dog while the handler works with another dog.
- ◆ Don't pet another dog unless the dog moves into your space and has loose and wiggly body language. If the dog is stiff or tense or seems uncertain, it is safer to keep your hands off till the dog relaxes or indicates he wants you to pet him (nuzzles his nose under your hand or rubs on you like a cat for example). Not all dogs that come into your space want to be touched; some just want to check you out.
- ◆ Don't feed any dog but your own unless the owner gives you permission. Some dogs have allergies

to certain things or need special diets. Others may get possessive of really yummy treats. If the dogs are loose try to slip treats to your dog without the others noticing. If a “mob” starts to form near you and the treats, stop treating till the group disperses to avoid fights over the food

- ◆ If the meeting includes off-leash play, this should only be for the dogs that are comfortable with other dogs. Turning a timid or uncertain dog loose with others does not help that dog trust you to keep it safe. On-leash dogs should never be in the same area as the off-leash dogs because the dogs on leash know they can't get away (or can't join in the play) and that can lead to fear or frustration.
- ◆ If your dog is attempting to mount other dogs, it's your job to disrupt this behavior. Call your dog or go get him/her. If the behavior continues, you might need to put your dog back on leash. If you see your dog (or any other) starting to “posture” or give pre-aggression signals like lip lifting or growling, notify the owners who should call the dogs, and/or walk between the dogs and try to disrupt their focus on each other. Avoid grabbing the collar unless really necessary because a collar grab may escalate the aggression rather than stop it.
- ◆ If your dog starts to bark while a presenter/instructor is speaking to the group, do your best to focus your dog's attention back on you and work on simple obedience that your dog knows (sit, down, touch, whatever) that you can reward in rapid fire sequence to keep the dog's attention. If your dog doesn't bark when other dogs do, but sure to thank your dog with a reward for being quiet.

Troop policies

With so many new troops forming all around the globe, DSA is offering some policies for troops, to help you know what is expected and what troops can expect both from DSA and from your local troop membership. Because many troops have formed in far away areas without the leader having the benefit of having attended a Dog Scout Camp, or received one-on-one leadership training, we're hoping that the following information will be helpful.

DSA Membership/Dues

Your local members must be members of DSA. By making sure everyone is a part of the national organization, you will insure that they are kept in the stream of things, they will be able to earn badges and be eligible for other member benefits like participating in troop activities or outings. So, just like the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, to participate, you must first join the parent organization, which provides all of the materials, training and guidance as your troop forms and grows.

An easy way to do this is to have membership forms available at your organizational meeting and all future troop meetings. There is a database on the membership page of the website that is updated about once a month where leaders can view the current membership list, to see if everyone in their troop has signed on as a member of DSA. It also lists each person's membership expiration date, so if you want to remind them of when they need to renew, you can do that too. A simple calendar will help you (or the troop member you designate) with that.

Some troops offer a "grace period" before asking the people to pay DSA dues. For instance, they may be invited to attend one or two private troop functions, to see if they think this is going to be something they're going to enjoy. However, most people have no problem with sending in their dues right away when they find out what a great and worthwhile organization DSA is. They pay dues based on the fact that DSA and its members help millions of dogs and their owners with their relationships and they want to be an active part of that.

There are some people who consider themselves the "benefactors" and they're constantly asking "What is Dog Scouts doing for ME?" These types may actually grumble about paying any dues whatsoever. But you can help them realize that the local troops wouldn't exist without the hard work of the National Organization and its Certification Program, as well as sharing the information listed in the programs section of this guidebook. DSA has a lot to offer, but it can't operate without the support of its members.

DSA Membership Dues and Junior Scouts: There is a special provision for troops that cater specifically to children. DSA was not started for children, but many people see the great value in the lessons that can be learned by the future responsible pet owners of the world. At of this writing, there are only two troops in the US that cater to children. Because some kids don't have the ability to pay the regular dues fees, we have made a special provision for these types of troops. Actually, the fees for DSA are very similarly structured to the Boy Scouts, and kids must pay those to participate in Boy Scout functions, purchase the handbooks for each badge, and otherwise exist as a troop. But, again, if you meet with reluctance or inability on the part of your young troop members to pay the membership fees, there is another option. For Jr. troops, they just need three people in the troop to pay the full dues fees. Each of the kids would then be able to join at the rate of \$6 per child as "additional family members" of the troop leader (the extra \$1 covers their membership card). They would not receive the other benefits of membership, like participation in the Backpacking Titling Program or membership discounts on camp or other materials, unless they paid the individual member rate.

Dog Scout Laws

Members must also pledge to uphold the Dog Scout Laws. These are rather simple rules of good manners, helpfulness to others, looking out for your dog's welfare, becoming a role model for other dog owners, and

obeying local ordinances. Be sure your troop and its members are learning and following the laws during troop functions.

Requirements from DSA: Paying the national membership dues and following the DSA laws are the only two things that the national organization requires of its local members. However, your local troop may find it necessary to make additional requirements. Some of these are outlined below.

Local Dues (optional)

If it is at all possible, it would be great if people did not have to be asked to pay local dues on top of the national dues. However, sometimes the Troop has expenses that need to be covered, like the maintenance of its own web site, booth rental fees at local events, mailing a troop newsletter, rental of a building that is used for meetings, costs for printing advertising brochures and business cards, or other expenses. If you can't get the above things/work done or donated by a member or volunteer, you might need to charge a small dues fee to cover troop expenses. Many troops function without the charging of additional dues, and this is one of the "bones of contention" where people don't understand the need to pay both National and Troop dues.

If the troop chooses to charge troop dues, the troop leader (or designated person) needs to contact the Certification Program Director prior to charging any dues. DSA needs to know:

- ◆ The amount you plan to charge
- ◆ What the fees will be used for
- ◆ How the fees are charged (per person, per household, per activity, one time fee, etc.)
- ◆ If the troop members get any goods in exchange for the dues (t-shirt, hat, etc.)

Local dues should be kept as low as possible to cover minimal expenses, and should not exceed \$12 per person per year. The troop leader (or troop treasurer) should be able to show what money came in and where it was spent on the end of year report each year. If the troop incurs additional expenses above what the dues will cover, they may make a plea for donations from their members, but these donations would not necessarily be tax deductible since they are being used to obtain a service or tangible item(s). If a troop needs assistance with promotional costs, contact the Certification Program Director.

Liability Issues

Some Troops have made prerequisites for membership in their local Troop that are for the purpose of safety and reducing liability. For example:

Release Forms/Waivers – Many troops require their members sign a waiver of liability at each function. This reminds people that they are responsible for their own dog's actions, and they are in charge of making sure that their own dog's environment is managed to prevent the dog doing harm to others or having harm done to him. Troops are welcome to do this. You may also have each troop member sign a single general waiver when they join and keep it on file.

Training Prerequisite – The first class that people attend at dog scout camp covers how to handle your dog around other dogs, how to get his attention, how to orchestrate proper dog greetings, how to understand dog communication, and how to keep your dog out of trouble. While learning these things is usually something you will do in the course of regular troop activities, some leaders may feel it prudent to make sure you have an understanding of these things before you attend an event where your dog will be mingling with other dogs.

To assume that the average pet owner already knows these things is a risk that the leader may not want to take. You may require that people read information on the above topics, troop rules, DSA laws, etc. or that they attend a free session offered by you or a designee on the topics before their dog can join in at troop events. If attendance is required, the sessions should be offered frequently and in the meantime the person should be allowed to attend troop functions without their dog. By the way, this information (titled “Dog Scout Class”) can be found on the DSA website in the “Guide to the Dog Scout Title”.

This is generally not needed though. Simply making the people aware of the rules and having them attend a meeting or two without their dog will help them understand how the meetings are run and what expectations are made of the members. If their dog has reactivity issues, you can discuss options regarding where their dog could have the most space in the meeting location, or ask that they enter the space without the dog first to announce that their dog is entering so no one is hanging out by the door where the dogs would come face to face.

If we get any reports that your troop is requiring too much in the way of training prior to allowing participation we will investigate to make sure the requisite class(es) is to insure their own safety, and the safety of others, and not just a ploy to fill the training club’s classes and make money. We do not want to see trainers or training centers starting Dog Scout Troops to benefit their own business. Scouting is all about sharing information and educating people, but if your leader happens to be a professional trainer, you should also not be joining the Dog Scout Troop only to take advantage of getting training for free or at a heavily discounted rate, for which you would otherwise have to pay.

Troop Policy Agreements – Some troops have actual policy statements, which the members have to read and agree to before attending group hikes or other functions. For example, a particular troop has a rule that when on the trails, a dog scout team must “pull over,” perform a sit stay, and give the right of way to the hiker, dog walker, or biker that is approaching. A troop policy might further state that you are required to pick up abandoned dog poop left behind by other careless owners or include picking up trash that you find along the hike. There may even be a “no foul language” clause. For activities where you’re greeting the public, like an educational booth or volunteer bell-ringing the troop may have a “one dog per person” clause.

The key to these types of policies is: does the policy encourage responsible dog ownership or is it required for safety reasons? If people feel that your troop or leader is making undue or unnecessary requirements of them, they may contact the Certification Program Director, and we will investigate.

Non-Exclusivity

Dog Scouts of America prides itself on not discriminating against any particular breed, size, sex, pedigree, color or age of dog, nor the age, sex, ability, beliefs or ethnic origin of the handler. Troops should likewise not discriminate or practice exclusivity. If, for example you want to start a troop for kids, you should also allow adults or families. Your troop could consist mostly of people from your local dog park, obedience class, church, flyball team, or yacht club, as long as it is not exclusively for just those people. All people should feel welcome and able to learn during troop events and any dog that is not a danger to others should be welcome to attend events where the dog can learn to be comfortable.

Troop Names

The name of your troop should not reflect the name of a training center, particular segment of society, person or entity. It is okay to use a geographical area as part of your troop name, for example the Cereal City Canines (from Battle Creek), or the Lone Star Paw Squad (from Texas), or the Northern Michigan Trailblazers (from Michigan). Names like “Boo-Boo’s Crew,” “Girls with Goldens,” “Petsmart Scouts,” or “The Trainer’s Academy Troop” would not be acceptable names.

Also, we are not like a certain national dog club, which allows local dog clubs to have a “monopoly” in certain areas with a 200 mile radius, preventing any additional groups from starting up there. DSA sees a future with Dog Scout Troops in every community, and there could very well be two or more within the same city. For that reason, you may want to include an adjective with your troop name. For example, the “Delaware Doggie Do-rights” would be better than the “Delaware Dog Scouts.” This would allow another troop to form, calling themselves the “Delaware Dogs That Care,” or something like that. Contact the National Organization regarding your choice(s) for a name. Most troops go by their troop number and familiar name, as in: “Dog Scout Troop 107 The Buckeye Blue Grass Brigade (BBGB’s).” This tells people that the troop is affiliated with DSA, and that it is located near the Ohio/Kentucky border.

Other Policies and Procedures

Yes, there are people who don’t realize that their dogs need to get groomed and bathed more regularly, and to avoid future embarrassment, you might want to state it right in your troop policies. At the very least, you should require members to bathe their dogs prior to any engagement like Therapy Dog visitations, Public Education, School Reading Programs, or really ANYTHING where they need to come in contact with the public.

With some people, you may need to detail how the DSA uniform should look and make it a policy that they actually wash it and possibly press it before use at a public function, instead of remembering that it was balled up behind the seat of the truck since the last event, and pull it on as they’re in the parking lot of the venue... If your Troop members wish to look alike, or if you want them to have their dogs wear a troop bandana, their uniforms, or other stuff to events, you should state that in a note to all participants. If anything about your troop requires “uniformity,” then you need to get that all spelled out (like wear black pants and white tennis shoes with your red DSA shirt for the parade.)

Your troop may set an attendance policy as long as it’s reasonable. Requiring every member to attend every troop function is not reasonable. Requiring that each member attend or help with at least 2 events per year would be more reasonable. You may, as stated earlier, require attendance at a “Smart End of the Leash” session before they try out for the Dog Scout Title or before they attend a meeting or certain type of function with their dog.

If your troop has some sort of preparatory meeting prior to undertaking bell-ringing, for example, it might be very important for participants to attend, so that the troop leader can see that each person and dog are ready to be thrust into the public, with kids petting and prodding your dog, loud noises all around, wearing Santa suits or other festive get-ups, and being asked to hold baskets or fetch dollar bills. Or, the leader may say that a particular activity is recommended only for dogs that have passed a Therapy Dog certification or the Dog Scout test. This is a judgment call for the leader. If anyone feels that their leader is making undue or unjustified requirements of them to participate in certain activities, and they don’t understand the validity of these requirements, they may contact the Certification Program Director.

Meeting Location Fees

There are some training organizations that charge a yearly fee for the use of their facility. For a set amount, the members are allowed to partake of as much or as little training as they care to at the particular center or facility. Much like the health club member or time-share member sales, the owner of the facility is often counting on people not using the facility and letting the whole thing go by the wayside (so that more memberships can be sold than the building could actually accommodate at any one time.)

If your troop becomes involved with one of these arrangements, we would hope that it was a last ditch choice.

In other words, you are paying a fee to use a building or doggie day care center because that is the only place (or only safe place) that your membership can count on for regular meetings which will hold the entire membership in inclement weather or whatever. If you can't get a local doggie daycare, veterinarian, or training center to donate the use of their center for troop meetings and such, you may be stuck in a "fee for services rendered" situation.

Rather than incorporate these fees into local troop dues, where people will be paying regardless of whether they are using the facility or not, I would suggest a pay-as-you-go system, where each person pays out of their pocket each time it is used. These fees should be cleared with DSA.

For example, if you rent the training center for \$20.00 per night. The leader would just collect \$2.00 per person to pay this fee. Some nights, you might have more than 10 people, and the excess could go in the "kitty," for a night when possibly fewer people were in attendance. Having a central place where the troop can meet for things such as play days, video nights, dog parties, and other stuff is a great idea, and most people wouldn't complain about paying a few bucks per person per use to have a safe, dog-friendly facility for their use. If any member feels that your troop is asking for too much money to cover such things, they may want to volunteer to look into alternate facilities, which could be used at no charge. If anyone thinks that the facility or person in charge of your troop is taking advantage of you to create revenue for themselves or someone else, they should contact the Certification Program Director.

Sponsorships

To date, we have not had a person or business offer to "sponsor" a Dog Scout Troop. To do this would not be appropriate for a DSA Troop.

What we do with Dog Scouts is a good thing. We're not out for profit, or to win dog shows, or receive fame... We just want to have people love their dogs more, have an appreciation for the human/canine bond, and help spread responsible dog ownership. Many organizations would see where it would benefit THEM to align themselves with such a worthy organization, to show that they care about these issues affecting their communities by donating goods or services. But Dog Scouts is not in the business of promoting other organizations' brands of dog food, political stance, or other products in exchange for funding. If you can get an organization to donate goods, services or money to the troop, based on the good work that we do, then that is fine. We can not compromise the integrity of Dog Scouts of America, however, by accepting sponsorships which result in the need for us to do advertising or endorsement for another entity or product. If we do endorse something, it's because of the good of the product in promoting a better life for people and their dogs, and not because we received something in exchange for it.

Use of the Dog Scout Logo

Many troops wish to use the DSA logo on their "stuff." Any and all use of the DSA logo must be approved by the National Organization (Contact the Certification Program Director with the design/layout). If you want to create a troop logo incorporating the DSA logo, or want to have business cards made up, or T-shirts or a banner for parades, or anything else that requires the use of the logo, we ask that you simply contact DSA first. The answer is usually yes, but we want to know what you're doing with it first. What you are NOT allowed to do with the DSA logo is to produce goods featuring the DSA logo which you will sell for a profit. We don't want troops producing the same goods that DSA has in Sparky's Boutique and Outfitters to sell, unless prior express permission is granted on a case-by-case basis.

Because we give you a one-time okay to do it in one case, does not mean that you'll be able to do it for an eternity. If you want to reproduce the DSA logo on troop jackets, or other attire, it is usually okay, as long as you don't charge more than the actual cost of the jacket. Please check to see if a logo use fee applies. We

may actually let you produce something, but charge a logo use fee. Also, you will usually be granted permission to reproduce something that you give away for free. Remember to keep asking on a case-by-case basis. Just because you get an okay for one thing doesn't mean that it's okay to do other things with the logo without asking. If it's something that has not come up before, Board approval may be needed before giving permission.

Troop Websites

If your troop would like a web presence, that is encouraged. However, it needs to be a stand alone site for the troop. Promoting the troop within a website for a business or other non-profit is not allowed. It's too easy for people to assume endorsement of the business or group by DSA. There are free options for giving your troop a web presence, like using a blog.

If your troop website has information about the DSA badges or any DSA forms, be sure to link people directly to this information on the DSA website rather than providing the forms or info on your troop site. If updates are made to the information or forms on the main site, your troop members might end up using old information if they are getting it directly from your site.

Be sure to let the Certification Program Director know your troop's website so it can be approved and listed on the troop locations page of the DSA website. If your troop publishes/posts articles to your troop site, those will need to follow the "DSA policy for publications" for on the "Help Support DSA" page.

We hope this helps clarify the DSA position on various situations and gives you a solid guideline to use with your troop. If you have any questions, please contact the Certification Program Director and if needed, he/she can present the question/issue to the Board of Directors.

Junior troops

Many troops in the U.S. have primarily adult members, but if you plan to have a troop that is mainly for people under 18 years of age, that is encouraged. A special optional membership rate has been developed for youth troops known as "Jr. Troops."

A group membership for youths (i.e., a Jr. Dog Scout Troop under the supervision of at least one adult DSA member, etc) is offered as long as there are at least 3 regular memberships for the troop, then Jr. Members (under 18) can join for an annual Jr. Scout fee of \$6.00 each. The Jr. members pay \$6 per year to get a membership card and DSA insurance coverage.

A Jr. Troop membership will include:

- 1) Membership cards for the Troop Leader and each Jr. Scout, distributed to the youth by their leader; and
- 2) All privileges offered to any adult troop of DSA

Any Jr. Scout member of a Jr. Troop can also have his/her dog become a Cadet Scout by following the same procedures as adult members and making the same \$5 fee payment as any other member in good standing.

This does not prevent any of the families in the troop from paying the full membership rate if they choose to do so. But for those children that will be joining under the "Jr. Troop" designation for \$6 each, it is easiest if these are sent in one envelope to the designated DSA membership chairperson. That address can be found on-line on the membership page of www.DogScouts.org

Once the troop is established (at least 3 registered members and a leader that is a member) then a troop number is issued and future Jr. Members can note on their membership forms that they are joining Jr. Troop # _____. That way the membership chairperson will understand why the membership is \$6 and not \$25.

Awards for youth members of your troop

Whether your troop is made up primarily of young members, or only has one or two, you might need to add to the curriculum to keep them interested and motivated. DSA does not dictate how you do this, but does offer some suggestions. Feel free to use these or customize them to suit the kids in your troop if you like.

You can outline stages of achievement based on what is required for a badge or particular activity. For example, each behavior they need to teach the dog for the Dog Scout test could be an award level. By doing this, the child gets awards/rewards more often, with the final award being the Dog Scout or Jr. Scout badge. This system can be adapted to any complex training situation. It can also be used for adult members of the troop!

Possible awards include:

- Certificates
- Ribbons
- Stickers
- Collectibles/ trinkets
- Tokens that can be collected and used to "purchase" other items

A reward can be anything, so you can get creative in your reward items. And a reward doesn't need to be a tangible item, it might be a trip or an outing or permission to do XYZ.

DSA encourages learning and positive training, so we want to encourage you to be creative in your teaching and rewarding of your troop members and their dogs, regardless of their age. When learning is fun and rewarding, more learning takes place.

For more information about using reward based methods for people, look into TAG teaching. This stands for "Teaching with Acoustical Guidance" and is basically clicker training for people! It also is a way of thinking about what you want the person to learn and then breaking it down into small and easily achievable steps, just like we do with the dogs.



Optional non-profit status

You can function as a troop without applying for non-profit status. However, if you DO want to be a non-profit troop there are a few requirements and there is annual paperwork that you need to fill out. A step-by-step guide has been written by troop leader Ann Withun to help any troops that want to pursue non-profit status as part of DSA's status:

http://www.dogscouts.org/Start_a_troop.html (section 17) There are many advantages, and more fundraising opportunities, for a troop with nonprofit status.

To be a tax-exempt troop, you must:

- ♦ be affiliated with and carry on the mission of the central organization (DSA).
- ♦ be subject to the central organization's general supervision and control.
- ♦ be eligible to qualify for exemption as an educational and charitable organization, just like the central organization.
- ♦ use the same accounting period (January 1 – December 31) as the central organization.
- ♦ have a detailed description of the purposes and activities of your troop, including the sources of receipts and the nature of expenditures. **You must provide this information to the central organization each year.**
- ♦ have a charter or articles of association, which mirror that of the central organization (sample on the website).

If you wish to be included in the group exemption (a letter has to be sent to IRS each year), then an authorized officer or agent of the troop must give permission to the central organization to include the troop in the group exemption letter each year.

You must supply this information in the form of a letter (sample on website).

It is important that your troop activities and goals closely emulate those of the central organization. The IRS does not exempt "social clubs." Anything that you do that could be termed of purely social benefit should be able to be deemed an "insubstantial" part of your activities.

When conducting your activities, try to find a way to center them around our educational or charitable goals.

Here are some examples of things that you can do, which are within the scope of our mission statement:

- Fundraisers (whether for our own organization, your troop, or some other charitable organization)
- Public Education (informational booths at pet fairs, presentations at schools, demonstrations, seminars)
- Regular meetings if educational (you may schedule skill-building activities and games, informational guest speakers, etc.)
- Group Outings (these can be included if you are performing some beneficial function in conjunction—see below)
- Volunteering (for a rescue group or local animal shelter, or engaging in animal assisted activities)

Working toward badges (Community Service qualifies—others you can attribute to enriching the human/canine bond. Remember, everything we do, the other scouting organizations already do, and the IRS cites them as an example in this section of the “tax exempt organizations” booklet.

Occasionally, you may find yourself wanting to schedule a field trip or outing that is purely for the enjoyment of the members. As long as this occurrence is insubstantial (not occurring often), the IRS doesn’t have a problem with it. However, you can make almost everything you do come under one of the categories of our mission statement if you can provide some beneficial educational aspect.

For example, a 4-H group leader approached the Camp Director asking if they could bring their kids out for a day of “fun” at the Dog Scout Camp. She told the group that they could come and use the facility at no charge with the understanding that they would either:

1. Sit down and listen to a talk about Responsible Dog Ownership and the Human/Canine Bond (and how to go home and teach it to others...), or
2. Come prepared to teach, demonstrate, or share something educational related to dogs for the entire group (myself included.) [By the way, she wasn’t even thinking of the IRS when she did this—She just figured that if she was going to give them a day of fun, then they were also going to learn about responsible dog ownership and positive training methods, because these kids are the adults of tomorrow.]

Even games can be educational. Most of the “games” that most troops play are skill-building games. Sports (like agility) help us to bond more closely with our dogs. Take an opportunity to mention these things when engaging in these activities. Use every opportunity to get the message of responsible dog ownership across. Have a “briefing” before your hikes, reminding the members that they must pick up after their dogs. They may even want to pick up trash along the way, some of which could count towards the “Clean-up America” merit badge. Being a good example to other dog owners is a way of educating them. Try to think of a way to slip into every activity something educational that goes along with our mission statement, vision and values found at the start of this guidebook.

What the IRS does NOT want to see is a “dog training club.” DSA had trouble getting the educational/charitable organization status because they thought that we were a bunch of dog trainers. Dog training clubs are vastly different from what we do within our Dog Scout Troops. Dog clubs are formed for people who like to engage in competitive obedience or conformation for their own edification, prize-winning, points, and furthering their breeding line’s list of achievements. The things that dog clubs do all year revolve around their hobby and their annual competitive events, which they hold to raise money for their club. Dog clubs tend to be more social in nature, and do not have a mission to improve the world.

As long as you keep these things in mind, you should be fine. Remember when you are creating member recruitment materials or advertising for your events, try to keep the word “fun” to a minimum. We recommend you try to use the phrase, “fun and functional activities,” so people know that it’s not just recreation—it’s a learning adventure.

Emphasize the learning opportunities, the development of a closer relationship with your canine friend, and an opportunity to become part of an organization that centers around dogs helping people and people helping dogs. Avoid using words like, “competition” and “dog training.” We’re not training dogs, we’re educating owners and we have skill-building games, not competitive events.

When educating the public, remember to use our key words to remind them of their responsibilities: Socialize, Train, Neuter and Contain. For kids, we want them to remember to Love, Respect, Teach and Protect their pets. Now Go, and make the world a better place!



Getting started

So you have read the preceding pages and want to start a troop! Fantastic! If you have not read the preceding pages, please do so before taking the steps below.

In a Nutshell: Starting and Maintaining a Troop

PHASE ONE: Connect with DSA.

Get listed as "future troop" and have DSA's support, get assigned a mentor (once we have that program established), potentially be eligible for small amounts of grant money.

Requirements: Troop Leader is a DSA member, has two additional DSA members interested in joining the troop, provides DSA with their contact information and area to be served by the troop and completes/passes the troop leader written test. Troop Leader agrees to abide by the policies set forth in the Dog Scout Troop Guidebook (positive training, inclusion of all, upholding the DSA laws and mission, etc.).

PHASE TWO: Earn Official Troop and Troop Leader status.

Get your troop number and be an official active troop

Requirements: Host at least 2 activities/meetings for people interested in joining your troop or to introduce DSA in your community, earn the Dog Scout badge on at least one dog (alternatives are available if you cannot do this within 1 year), advise DSA of the name and contact information of the "emergency contact" for your troop **Timeline:** no more than 12 months from completion of phase one

PHASE THREE: Maintain Official Troop and Troop Leader Status.

Maintain an active troop so your troop can remain listed on the DSA website.

Requirements: Join the DSA Leaders Yahoo Group, create a system to verify DSA membership of your troop members (& keep your own membership current), host at least 1 troop activity per quarter, submit end of the year reports in a timely manner, update the DSA calendar regarding your troop activities and share your troop activities with others by sending troop news to the newsletter editor.

Below is a more detailed checklist for getting a troop started:

____ Your first step is to become a member of DSA. All troop leaders, Scoutmasters and Evaluators must keep their DSA membership current.

____ Your second step is to submit the troop leader written test (found on the "start a troop" page) to the Certification Program Director. This test is easy if you have read this guidebook and understand positive training. It also allows you to tell us more about you and your goals for the troop. The test is "open book" and meant to encourage you to look over the info available. You'll also want to finish reading this guidebook since it has several of the answers to the test questions.

Along with the written test, submit:

- ◆ Your full name as you would like it to appear on the website
- ◆ The email address you want listed on-line

- ◆ The geographical area your troop will cover (to be listed on line)
- ◆ Your mailing address (kept private)
- ◆ Your phone number (kept private)
- ◆ Any alternate email you wish the CPD to use to contact you in case your primary email stops working (kept private)
- ◆ Your DSA membership number or date you sent your membership payment to DSA.
- ◆ The name of the dog you earned the Dog Scout title on so it can be verified

As your membership, Dog Scout badge and test answers are verified, you may proceed through the following steps.

_____ Be sure to fully read all the pages available to you on the Dog Scout website and the pages of this guide regarding the starting of a troop. The written test makes sure you understand and have read the basics about the organization but there is so much more! Troop leaders are not required to become certified to also become Scoutmasters (and therefore able to administer the Dog Scout test,) but it is encouraged. A person in the troop other than the leader can work to become a certified Scoutmaster and take on this responsibility if you prefer. Every leader is encouraged to learn as much as possible about reward based dog training and how to improve human/canine communication. Presentations of this information to your troop members are encouraged and can be based on information you learn from the DSA website or presented by guest speakers.

_____ Be sure you are willing to adhere to DSA's official Position on Punishment when you are in public and especially when representing DSA. (Ideally, we encourage everyone to adhere to these guidelines at ALL times.) You can find DSA's Position on Punishment at the top of the "Helpful Articles" page on the DSA website, and it is reprinted here:

Dog Scouts of America Position on Punishment

Dog Scouts of America's position is that force, fear and harsh physical corrections should not be used for dog training. This includes but is not limited to: rough or inhumane use of any training aid such as choke chains, electronic collars, leash "pops", alpha rolls, and other forms of training that cause fear or pain in the dog. To state it plainly:

Punishment-based training is not supported by DSA. It is strongly discouraged for use by our members when they are in public. It is not used by DSA staff (including Camp Staff, Troop Leaders, Scoutmasters, and Evaluators) when teaching others.

If you need more information about how to use positive reinforcement training for a particular problem or to train a certain behavior, there is a lot of information on our website to help you. You can also ask on the Yahoo group for advice. We have had to inform people they could no longer be a troop leader based on reports about the methods they use, so we want to be sure this position is clearly understood from the start.

_____ Be sure you are willing to accept any person or dog as a member of your troop. You will become a better trainer when you need to learn how to help a person with a training problem. And DSA is all about helping people learn how to connect with their dogs to help them be the best they can be. The Troop Leader Guidebook and the DSA website have lots of information on how to do this and the DSA talk list and leadership Yahoo group are always available to help you. You might also have other, more experienced leaders that are close enough to help you if needed.

_____ If you have not already done so, we encourage you to join the free DSA discussion list and encourage your troop members to do the same. Simply visit: http://www.dogscouts.org/Discussion_List.html You'll be given the address for the Troop Leaders Yahoo group once you are assigned a troop number.

Once your membership, your troop members' memberships, and your written test answers are verified, you will be listed online as a "future troop" and may proceed with these next steps:

_____ Let the CPD know the name of the alternate emergency contact for your troop. This is a person the CPD can contact if for some reason (like serious illness) you are not reachable. The CPD will need to know the person's name, email and phone number. This person's only responsibility is to let the CPD know if the troop leader is unable to continue as the troop leader (if the troop leader is unable to do this themselves). Be sure to update this with the CPD if the contact person changes at any point in the duration of the active status of the troop.

_____ Announce your intent to start a troop in your area to the public DSA talk list and/or DSA Facebook page. You can contact the DSA newsletter editor to add a note about your future troop in there as well (See the "contact us" page of the DSA website for the editor's contact info. The newsletter reaches people who already have an interest in DSA that might be excited about joining your troop and helping you right away.

_____ Determine the level of interest in your area by checking the membership database on the "Join us" page of the DSA website. If you see names of people in your area, you can contact the CPD who will send them an email on your behalf to let them know a new troop is starting in their area. You'll also need to tell people in your area about DSA to get them as excited about it as you are and to encourage them to join! This can be done by hanging signs and posters asking people to contact you if they would be interested in participating in a troop, print and hand-out business cards, offer to present info about DSA at a local dog club's monthly meeting and talk to every person you meet about it! Maintain a contact list of anyone who expresses interest so you can let them know about activities you plan. There are sample flyers available on the DSA website. These can be hung at groomers, vets, dog day cares, dog parks, public social events, dog training facilities, supply stores, shelters, etc. You can also contact breed rescues in your area and tell them about Dog Scouts. Then they can tell the people who adopt dogs from them. Providing a flyer for them to include in their "adoption packet" may be the best way to get the info passed along. Please be sure to get permission from the property owner before posting anything about DSA!

_____ It is recommended that you find a location to hold an informational meeting (this can be without dogs if you like) during which you can share information about DSA and the plans for a troop. Advertise this like crazy! Have DSA membership applications ready to hand out to each attendee. There is a power point presentation on the "start a troop" page that you can use if you have access to the equipment needed. Have each person sign-in with their name and email address so you can contact them in the future about troop activities. If needed, you can hold more than one of these types of meetings to draw in more people and potential members. Varying the location and day of the week these are held might encourage new people to attend.

Potential locations you could use for meetings include: park pavilions, dog training centers, dog daycare facilities on the weekends, horse barns, fairground buildings, property owned by troop members, etc. Locations that don't charge a fee are of course best for new troops. The locations you can use for the informational meeting without dogs are more available- library meeting rooms work well, a meeting room

within a business where a troop member works, some fire houses have meeting/training rooms and may even allow the dogs. Troop meetings can be planned as part of other activities like hikes or training days that might dictate where the activity takes place. Of course if you own your own training facility, that makes “location” easy! If you teach for a training club in your area, you may have better luck with them allowing facility use in exchange for your services. You might also check with the local pet supply store to see if you could use their training space. Play up the fact that you will be bringing them potential clients (if they use training methods approved by DSA). The troop should not be “competition” to local training centers, but instead, offer their clients additional opportunities to do fun things with their dogs and learn things the training center doesn’t teach.

____ Once you have 3 or more people (from 3 or more different households) that you are certain have joined DSA (full memberships) and want to join your troop, let the CPD know. Your own membership is included in the three needed.

- ◆ Simply submit the full names of those people to the CPD along with their method of payment (mailed or on-line). Please allow time for the membership application and payments to get to the membership department before submitting the names and be sure that the people HAVE applied for membership. Once the names you submit are verified as members, you will be issued a troop number. These are issued sequentially, so you are not able to request a specific number, sorry.
- ◆ You’ll also need to let the CPD know the name of the alternate contact for your troop. This is a person the CPD can contact if for some reason (like serious illness) you are not reachable.
- ◆ If your troop will have a co-leader, that person will need to go through the same requirements you have completed.

____ You’ll want to get the Dog Scout title on at least one dog and submit the paperwork so it is recorded in DSA’s records. There is a demo video and lots of written help on the website to help you with this. The badge can be earned by video, in-person for a DSA certified Scoutmaster or at a Dog Scout camp. This badge will allow you to demonstrate your understanding of positive training and help you better understand the standards for DSA badges and the process of earning them so you can help your troop members with this. It also demonstrates your commitment to DSA and that your dog has basic manners and can be a good ambassador for DSA.

ONCE YOU’VE COMPLETED THE ABOVE STEPS, YOU’LL BE ISSUED A TROOP NUMBER:

____ You’ll need to join the DSA troop Leaders Yahoo group to stay informed of updates and get other information from DSA and the Certification Program Director. You can also use the list to ask questions of other DSA leaders and from time to time, DSA uses the list to ask questions of the leaders in order to improve programs and services. You’ll get the list address once you have a troop number.

____ Start collecting troop information for either the Troop Recognition Program or the “short form” end of the year report. Each troop must submit one of these forms to DSA at the end of each year to be considered as an “active” troop.

____ For your troop name it is recommended that you use the troop number and geographical location. For example: Dog Scout Troop #101-Northern Michigan. Or you could add a familiar name, like Dog Scout Troop #101- Trail Blazers of Northern Michigan. You could then refer to your group informally as the “Trail Blazers.” Please refer to the troop policy page regarding name restrictions. Once your troop has decided on a name, you can let the CPD know so it can be added to the website.

_____ All troop members need to be members of DSA to participate at the troop level. You will need to maintain a system for making sure all your troop members pay their dues to DSA and keep dues current (this is a good job for a troop member.) If you need membership forms, you can find them on the DSA site. If a person prefers to mail-in their application and fees, look for the words "Printable Membership Application" on the membership page. It's ok to let new people visit 1 or 2 troop activities before they join if you choose. You should have everyone sign a liability waiver.

_____ Your members must be willing to obey the Dog Scout Laws and be responsible dog owners, showing a good example for all to see. You will want to provide copies of the Dog Scout Laws to potential members of your troop as well as the troop rules found in this guidebook). They are also expected to help you with the running of the troop. If there are interested people or DSA members who have not actually taken and passed the DSA test, you can conduct training classes to prepare them for taking the DSA test, or you can recommend that they take one or more reward based obedience class sessions, so that you are helping everyone in your group have a well behaved dog. But getting the Dog Scout test/ title is not a requirement to join the troop or DSA.

It is vital for our public image to be one of, "I want a well-behaved dog like that!", or "I want to be more like that person." So you may restrict the dogs that are still learning manners to "troop only" events like meetings, walks and troop social events while dogs that have proven their self-control and manners (and/or have owners good at managing their dog) can represent your troop and DSA at public functions like booths and parades.

_____ Strive to learn more about Dog Scouts and what you can do to pass that knowledge to your troop members. Also make use of the knowledge of troop members or community members. The use of all reward based training should be encouraged and you, as the leader, will be expected to set a good example of the use of only reward based training methods. Activities like fundraisers for local shelters, walks on local trails and troop meetings are great for troop building. You can put troop members in charge of these activities.

_____ Your troop may want to conduct fundraising activities to fund troop outings, or to supplement the members' enrollment fees so they can attend camp. It is entirely up to you which fundraising activities you engage in. Many troops conduct fundraising activities to donate the proceeds to worthwhile non-profit dog organizations that engage in humane education (like DSA), house unwanted pets, or train service dogs for special tasks. The DSA name and affiliation cannot be used to raise funds or otherwise support political campaigns, lobbying organizations, or radical groups.

How do I know if another organization is appropriate to be affiliated with?

The DSA name and affiliation cannot be used to raise funds or otherwise support political campaigns, lobbying organizations, or radical groups. There are many animal-related groups whose primary activities are actually political in nature, such as the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS, not to be confused with local shelters that may also have the words "humane society" in their names) or the National Animal Interest Alliance (NAIA) - both of these groups spend a large percentage of their budgets on political lobbying. Other animal related groups may be associated with criminal activities performed either by their members or in their name, such as the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) or People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) - these would also be inappropriate groups for DSA to be affiliated with in any capacity.

DSA does not seek to limit the personal activities of its members, but when DSA's name, resources, or affiliation are used, association with groups such as these must be avoided. Remaining non-political allows DSA to better reach all dog owners regardless of their political views.

_____ If you would like your troop to be a non-profit, plan to be asking for grants, and/or raising more than \$5,000 per year, then you should look at the links related to becoming a DSA non-profit sub-group. Your troop may be eligible for many more fundraising opportunities and grants with official nonprofit status. These pages will help walk you through that process and can be found on the “start a troop” page of the DSA website. **Until you get a number from the IRS designating your troop as an official DSA sub-group, your troop is not a non-profit organization.** But if you raise funds specifically for DSA (or other non-profit), donations made during that fundraiser are tax deductible.

_____ Your troop will need to host at least 1 activity per quarter to remain listed on the website as an active troop. One idea is to have a “game night” once a month, where the people get together and conduct fun, skill building exercises with their dogs. These could also be incorporated into troop meetings. Some examples would be: The “My Dog Can Do That” game, The Copy Cat game, Tic-Tac-Dog or IMPROV Obedience matches. There is an explanation of games for troop meetings in the start a troop section and information about IMPROV can be found on the “Competitions and Titling” page of the Dog Scout website. Activities like troop hikes, discussion of a dog training DVD on a “movie night” and troop meetings can all satisfy the activity requirements.

_____ DSA encourages educational activities for both the membership and the public at large. If your troop wanted to sponsor a speaker, and make it open to the public (as a community education event), or charge admission to anyone who is not a member (as a fundraiser), that would be acceptable. Having speakers come to your meetings and announcing these meetings in the local papers and inviting the public is good PR. Don’t forget to inform DSA about your troop activities ahead of time, so that they can be mentioned in the newsletter, or submit a written blurb about your events with photos after they are completed. Check the newsletter for ideas from other troops for new activities.

_____ If possible, attend a leadership retreat or Dog Scout camp. The best teacher is a hands-on experience in the beautiful North Woods of Michigan or at a mini camp. The retreats are free to Dog Scout members (you pay for your lodging.) The retreats and camps are a wonderful way to sharpen your skills and learn new things in a positive environment. All troop members that have a leadership role in your troop can attend the leadership retreat too.

_____ If you would like to become a Scoutmaster (meaning you are certified to give the Dog Scout test,) contact the Certification Program Director and let her know. All of the guidelines and information about the Dog Scout test and Scoutmaster Certification is on-line and in the guide to the Dog Scout title found at: http://www.dogscouts.org/Certification_Program.html

_____ Once you have some experience as a troop leader, you may be called upon to help others start a troop within a driving distance that you designate or through on-line or over the phone help.

Avoiding burnout

As a Troop Leader for Dog Scouts of America, you are helping promote our mission on a local level, which is very important to us. You are very much appreciated, and the work you do is very critical. It is very important that you know how much you ARE appreciated, because “volunteer” work is often taken for granted, and that in itself leads to burnout. We have included a few tips here, to help you as a leader to avoid burnout. We hope you find it helpful. If you have anything to add, please let us know. Thanks again!

We are offering these tips, assuming that you have already read all of the other information available to you, to help in the Leadership process (on the “Start a Troop” page and in this guidebook.)

#1 GET HELP!



Having a “co-leader” and a “division of labor” is a really good idea. If you become ill, overextended, burned out, or incapacitated for a period of time, you will have confidence that things can go on as usual. Knowing that you are the only glue that holds something together is very stressful. Everything falls on your shoulders. This is no fun. Those of us with leadership qualities enjoy knowing that we are helping people “be all they can be,” but sometimes it can feel burdensome too.

This job is rewarding, but has its ups and downs. A co-leader can help you cope with some of the down sides of the job. Two heads often work better than one, and if you have a co-leader, you can feel more free to take some needed time off. There may come a time when you actually have to move from the area and your disappearance could lead to the troop dissolving if you don’t have another person ready to take on the responsibility.

Don’t be afraid to delegate responsibilities. With all that having a troop entails, it can easily be broken up into various categories. Fundraising, Outings, Continuing Education, and Community Service are four categories that leap to mind. You may find that people’s reasons for wanting to join a troop vary, and some people may be very “gung-ho” about the outings, and others very passionate about fundraising. Using their enthusiasm for their favorite aspect of troop membership by placing them in charge of all or some of those duties will take a great load off you. Have someone else in charge of finding a fun place to go hiking each month. Have someone else find a new source for an educational presentation or project to work on. Have someone else be the contact person for Community Service activities, or the newsletter editor, or secretary, or membership chairperson or whatever else you can delegate.



Remember why you wanted a troop in the first place. Do what you are the best at doing.

Lonnie says:

DSA founder Lonnie Olson says “I had someone bring home a very important fact to me at our first Dog Scout Camp of 2001. The camper pointed out that “Lonnie is a very good director and dog trainer, but her strengths don’t lie in hotel management or food service!” After I hired full time food service staff, and an administrative assistant, the camps ran so much more smoothly for the rest of the summer. I was less stressed, and the campers had a much better experience because Lonnie wasn’t trying to do it all.”

Do what you are good at doing, and find someone else to take care of the other things. There will be someone who is good at those other things, and they will surely offer their help if it means the smoother operation of their troop functions. No matter how talented you are, you can't do it all, and you shouldn't try to. If you're like many people, you feel that if you want it done right, the best way is to do it yourself. However, if you will just "let go," and allow someone else the opportunity, you may be pleasantly surprised!

Troops require TEAMWORK!

Maintain that theme. If you start out thinking that you're the only one who knows what direction you're going, then you will always just have a group of followers, and you may actually prevent or discourage other troop members from stepping up to share their skills and talents. Get your members involved, and help them to accept responsibility. Try to match people with small tasks that they will enjoy doing. You will be amazed at the benefits you will receive.



Lonnie says:

"When we started assigning clean-up details at camp, we thought we might get whining from the campers. Instead, we had people tell us how much they actually loved that aspect of camp, and what a great team building exercise it was!"

#2 Don't Panic!

Keep a good attitude. Nothing is insurmountable. If you're having trouble, you can always turn to the Certification Program Director or the other leaders for advice or help. Remember: **People Vary**. Don't let personalities get in the way. In any place and any activity, you will sometimes come across difficult people. Don't let them rain on your parade.

Hang in there! We have our ups and downs. When things get tough, it can go from, "Wow, this is great!" to "I don't want to do this any more!" in one second flat. Don't let a setback or two make you decide to give up. Settle down, count to ten, relax, do some deep breathing, remember that people vary, and then move on. Remember what you love about DSA, and what inspired you to start a troop in the first place. Perhaps you are overly stressed because you are not taking full advantage of suggestion #1 (Get help!)

Re-examine your priorities. Are there things you're doing that you could do without? Are you doing **too much**? Maybe you should just focus on the most important things. If there are other things you wish to do, too, see #1 (get help!) Remember that as a troop leader, there are very few requirements made of you from national headquarters. If you are going "above and beyond" the call of duty, I suggest you re-read suggestion #1 (get help!), or read on (learn to say "no").

You might give troop members a calendar of events that you will lead, and then a list of other possible activities—and let them know that if someone would like to lead one or more of those activities, you will be happy to assist them. That way, your members can choose to help with a few things in order to expand your troop's calendar, but you've limited your own workload to a manageable amount.



Learn to say, “no.” This goes along with re-examining your priorities above. It’s easy, as a leader, to just keep taking on additional responsibilities—especially if each project has a goal you believe in. Remember—the whole troop benefits when its leader is energized rather than overworked.

Take advantage of outside help. If you are finding that your troop needs more than you are capable of providing to them, don’t be afraid to refer them to an outside source. If you see that your average troop member needs more extensive training, for example, that is not something you are required to provide as the troop leader. You can always refer the members to a training class in your area where they can get the help they need. They should not join your troop with the idea that you are going to provide free training classes for them.



An occasional educational meeting which covers important concepts like “leave it”, skill-building games or indirect access exercises is one thing. In-depth training is quite another. Don’t be afraid to refer a member to a good local training facility. If there is no good training facility in the area and you end up being forced to offer a class yourself to cover the necessary items to help your troop members learn how to positively train their dogs to do the things necessary to be good Dog Scouts, you can do that outside of your job description as troop leader and charge a fee for your services.

Keep a list of trainers, books, etc. to refer people to, in lieu of getting help from you directly—giving people another option instead of a flat “no” can be an easier message to deliver.

You can also keep a list of requests, and let people know “you will add them to the request list”—this can also be easier than just saying “no” while it lets people know you have many other responsibilities already to prioritize. You can use this list to select future projects, and share the list with other troop members who may be able to help.

Don’t “whine” about it.

If you’re feeling overwhelmed, you need a solution—and complaining is never that solution. While it can be good to confide in a friend, and even a fellow troop member, do it in a way that opens the door for a solution. Ask for help, suggestions, or support—but try to do so in a way that’s constructive, and invites others to pull you up, rather than in a way that brings others down.

If your troop members are putting too much pressure on you, then find a way to make your feelings known to them. You need to speak to the people who are able to affect a change in the situation. Are you putting too many demands on yourself? Better see #1 (get help!) or learn to say no.



#3 Don't lose the vision!

Keep sight of the long-term goal.

Remember, you are changing the world. You are spreading the concept of responsible dog ownership and touching many people's lives. You are making the world a better place for future generations. You are helping people to engage in activities that will magnify their bond with their dog. You are creating responsible dog owners. You are helping keep dogs as valued members of the family and not as something to be discarded at the first sign of problems. You are reducing the number of unwanted dogs in the country by making them **wanted, valued** family members who have more freedom to accompany their owners because of their good behavior and their owner's commitment to responsibility.



Feel GOOD about yourself! You are important. If you weren't here, doing what you do, the world would be different. Think of all the lives you've touched. Remember the ripple effect (you are the stone that creates ripples in the water when you meet others who in turn become ripple makers too.)



You may think that what you do is small potatoes, but those ripples go out and continue to have an effect on people and the world. If this doesn't make you feel important, it should. You are important to DSA. And you are important to a lot of other people, even the ones that don't tell you so. Your efforts are very much appreciated!



Take it one step at a time. Pace yourself. We can't change the world in a day. But, be certain, we ARE changing the world, one step at a time.

Don't overload yourself trying to "do it all" right now. Just do what you can do. Set reasonable goals for yourself, and take time to celebrate when you reach them. If you take on too much and become overloaded, you will be subject to burnout, you may decide to pack it all in and then we wouldn't have you at all!

Troop Leaders Frequently Asked Questions:

“Do I have to attend Dog Scout Camp or a leadership retreat?”

No. These are not requirements. While it is extremely helpful to have attended camp to have fully experienced the “Dog Scout way” and the spirit of our organization, it is not a necessity. Leadership retreats are very helpful to new troop leaders (and seasoned leaders) but we know that not everyone can get to Michigan. As DSA grows and more troops are started, the Leadership Retreats may be offered in other parts of the country.

“Does my dog have to earn the Dog Scout badge?”

Troop members do not have to earn the Dog Scout badge with their dogs—this is an optional program, although it is an excellent project to work on to help members hone their dog training skills and improve their dogs’ level of training.

Troop Leaders do need to earn the Dog Scout badge, as part of becoming a Troop Leader (see details in the “Getting Started” section of this Guidebook.) By earning this badge, you are able to show DSA you have the training skills and understanding of positive reward training needed to help others with basic training. It also shows a level of commitment and helps you better understand how the membership and badge programs work. Troop Leader candidates should contact the Certification Program Director for assistance, or with any questions.

“How Do I Get Troop Members?”

Obviously, you will need members if you want to start a troop. The trick is getting people as excited and motivated as you are! Odds are good that in your area there are several people who have not heard of Dog Scouts of America, but as soon as they do they will be just as excited about it as you are! Troops can be started with as few as three members, but additional members are encouraged.

Putting up signs that let people know you are starting a troop is a good first step. Be sure the signs tell people a bit about what Dog Scouts is, because most have probably never ever heard about it. Perhaps they will assume it’s a kid’s group or maybe they will think it’s for service dogs or search and rescue dogs. They might also assume it is for well-trained dogs only. Of course those people and dogs are welcome, but DSA is not that exclusive-- all are welcome! Creating a sign that has a pocket for your business cards or a sign with the little rip off strips at the bottom is best.

Places you can hang your signs once you get permission are: Pet Supply stores, Vet’s offices, Training Centers, Dog Daycares, Dog Parks, Dog Related fundraisers, Shelters, Grooming Shops, and anywhere else you see dogs and/or their owners congregate.

Also be sure to keep a stack of business cards or brochures handy. You can give them to every dog owner you meet! Also give some to your friends, family and troop members to hand out too.

A classified ad in a local dog paper (if your town has one) or even in the main newspaper might also generate some interest. If you are the first troop in your area, contact the media to see if they would be interested in doing a story about it! Make good friends within the media, they will come in handy for promotion of various troop activities and events.

“What if there doesn’t seem to be anyone interested in my area?”

If you are trying to establish your troop in a sparse “dog person” area, you may have to attract members from further away. This may make regular meetings difficult. When you do have meetings, the people are going to want it to be something “worth the trip.” Seek out places that the local dog owners congregate (training centers, doggie daycares, parks, etc. and try to reach them there. See if your area has a Yahoo group or meet-up group you can join to promote the troop. Try not to get discouraged. Keep trying to advertise and use all the various advertisement means you can think of (or that are listed in this guidebook).



“Where can I hold a meeting?”

If attendance is small, you could hold it at your house or the house of a willing troop member, but most people are more comfortable meeting at a public place if it's their first time meeting the group. If you have a Dog Daycare in your area, contact them about using their facility during the weekends (most are closed during the weekend) or after hours. Some vet's offices have training or conference rooms. Check with your local training centers and shelters about the availability of space.

If the weather is nice, you can have your meetings at a local park. If you have fairgrounds near by, check into using one of the buildings or barns (some are even heated if in a cold climate.) An indoor arena at a local horse farm or boarding stable might also work. You may have to think 'outside the box' to come up with a suitable location. Fenced or indoors is best, but any area where the dogs will be safe and welcome will do. Regardless of where your meetings are held, be sure everyone cleans up after their dog. Troop members should always have at least two clean up bags on them for each dog they have with them. If you meet in an indoor location and the dogs leave a noticeable amount of hair that should get cleaned up as well. If the facility doesn't have clean-up supplies readily available, be sure to bring your own for wet accidents. You may be surprised at how much support you might get from your local dog training clubs and schools, once they realize that you are not there to compete with them, but to work with them and give their students “extra curricular” stuff to do that they can't get at the training club.

“What do Dog Scout Troops do?”

The troop can be as active as you like with a minimum of only 4 get-togethers per year. It is preferred that your troop have at least 1 activity per quarter so that there are not large gaps with no activity. Many times, it depends on the desires and participation of the members of the troop. Ask them what they are interested in learning or doing. If it is an activity that you are not familiar with, look at it as a learning opportunity. Do some research or ask a guest speaker to teach or present the activity. Here's a list of things that other troops have done:

Troop meetings (Including socialization, games, and learning), group walks/hikes, fundraisers (bell ringing for Salvation Army, bake sales to buy police dogs bullet proof vests, participation in charity events held by other organizations), swim days at local parks that allow dogs, therapy visits by all therapy certified dogs in the troop, in-school programs (reading to dogs, bite prevention, pet care, etc.), participation in local parades, fun runs or competitions for various dog sports (rally obedience, agility, herding, etc.), campouts, river trips in canoes or kayaks, parties, bike rides, get together to watch videos on dog training or dog related movies, Canine Olympics or other fun contests of skill or education, working on earning badges, any other activity your group can do.



Troop camp out



Kayak trip



Swim Day

“What other things might be a good idea for running a troop?”

Some troops maintain a troop newsletter, others have a talk list or message board set up. Having a troop website is encouraged (but please make sure it is maintained so that prospective new members aren't finding outdated info and broken links in a website no one maintains any longer.) You can give

troop members different positions and duties within the troop. You can put someone in charge of financing/fundraising, record keeping, meeting/seminar topics, activity organizing, etc. The more you can delegate, the easier it will be on you. A co-leader is also encouraged to take your place if you are ill or unavailable and to help with difficult decisions.

“What activities should the troop offer?”

You may think about what kinds of educational programs or field trips you could organize as a group. Backpacking is one activity that is healthy and enables people to work toward their PackDog titles, in addition to having a fun outing with other people who treasure the company of their dogs. Training events in which the person and dog learn new skills, perhaps toward a badge are also popular.

You may want to periodically offer Dog Scout “tests” for practice. This will help the leaders get more experience evaluating, and the troop members get more practice. It will also help you to get an idea of which dogs “need more help,” and should be referred to a local positive training organization for some remedial manners and control (if you are not able to help them yourself). If you are interested in becoming a Scoutmaster, you can hold practice tests and videotape them as part of your training process. This can also help the people/dogs going through the test get their title/patch. Once you have some Dog Scouts in your troop, you can work on the specialty badges the same way.

Some of the elements of the Dog Scout Test that are not required of dogs in some of the other tests (like Therapy Dog, Canine Good Citizen, or Temperament Test) are the “Leave it” and the “Plays Well With Others.” Many community dog-training classes do not place emphasis on these points, either. Therefore, it may be necessary to help your troop members with some sessions on “Leave it” and some structured play activities where the dogs can safely interact. The dogs do not have to actually “play,” but must show that they are safe around people and other dogs.

“What’s the deal with the badges?”

The DSA badges are a way to show that your dog has learned an activity using positive training and that you, as the owner, care enough about your dog to take the time to exercise his or her mind without force or compulsion. Earning badges is not a requirement, but it can be fun and help people find out what their dogs are interested in doing. It also helps teach the dog to learn and the owner learns a bit more about his or her dog and about dog training in the process as well.



DSA strives to maintain a high standard for the testing of badge activities. It is our goal to have each dog tested in the same way and by the same high standards as the next dog. We don’t let just anyone earn or administer the badges. All participants in the program have to prove that they fully understand the standards by which the badges are earned. Dogs and owners are welcome to work on as many different badge activities as they would like at any time. A certified Dog Scout Evaluator (if available in your area) can test them in person or the testing can be done through video submission. There are more details in the “Understanding the Merit System” section later in this guidebook.

“What badge do I earn first?”

Before any badge forms can be turned in to DSA, the dog and owner need to have passed all the requirements of the Dog Scout badge and get ‘checked off’ (tested) by a certified Scoutmaster or through the video process. Then the owner submits the Dog Scout Badge form and the badge fee to DSA. It is a good idea to have someone in the troop that is a Scoutmaster. Otherwise, you could arrange for a Scoutmaster that is near you (if there is one) to visit your troop on at least three different occasions to meet any dogs/owners that want to be evaluated for the Dog Scout badge/title and then the Scoutmaster can evaluate those dogs/owners. Or you can help your troop members through the worldwide certification program that is done by video and written tests. Be sure to read all the information associated with the Dog Scout badge on the “badges” page of the website before doing any videotaping. Earning the badge with your own dog will help you help others with this process.



“How do I earn specialty badges?”

Once the dog is certified as a Dog Scout, he/she can earn other Dog Scout badges. When dogs and owners have mastered all the steps in the check off sheet for a particular badge, the owners will need to find a Dog Scout Evaluator (DSE) certified to administer that badge test (or videotape themselves performing all the badge requirements as specified on the check-off sheet and in the Evaluation Criteria.) DSE's do not have to be Troop Leaders or Scoutmasters, but they can be. You might come across a DSE certified to administer the Agility badges at an Agility trial for example. Or perhaps there is someone in your troop that is well trained in one or more particular badge activities. That person could become a DSE for those badges.

Once the dog/owner is 'checked out' for the requirements of a particular badge and the certified DSE signs the badge form, the owner will submit the form to DSA along with the badge fee. The fee covers all the development stages of the badge (and future badges) including art work and design, filing of paperwork and record keeping, postage for the badge, any equipment needed to offer the badge at camp and the cost of the patch itself. Learning badge activities is fun and provides great learning experiences for both the dog and the owner. It's also often much less expensive than earning other dog sport titles on a dog!

If you or anyone else in your troop is interested in becoming a Scoutmaster or Dog Scout Evaluator, the DSA Certification Program Director (CPD) should be notified. More detailed information can be found on the "Certification Program" pages of the Dog scouts website and later in this guide in the "earning badges by video" section.

“Can the owners earn the merit badges?”

It's the dogs that earn the merit badges (with the owner's help), and they must have passed the Dog Scout Test. The owners will be helping the dog learn the badge activity and there is always something that the owner has to show they understand, but the badges are not transferable to other dogs the owner has. The owner's membership shows their support of the organization and its principles and entitles them to participate in member activities, like Dog Scout Outings, national contests, local troops, and other membership activities or programs.

In addition, members can have their dog participate in DSA Competition & Titling programs, such as PackDog, and earn titles, certificates, and/or patches for meeting requirements at various levels. These titles can be earned even before their dog becomes a scout.

“If I am a member, and my dog passes the Dog Scout Test, then can we earn merit badges?”

Yes. There are a few badges that can easily be earned outside of camp without a video, like Community Service, Clean-up America, Temperament Tested (through ATTS), Therapy Dog, Letterboxing and Geocaching. These are "on your honor" badges and require the keeping of records or a logbook page to record your progress. PackDog titles are different and separate from the backpacking merit badge, and titles can be earned prior to the dog becoming a Dog Scout. All of the other badges are available outside of camp through the video process or with a certified Dog Scout Evaluator.

Each DSA week long camp offers all the levels of the core badges: Agility, Water, Trails and Shaping (Obedience.) Each camp also offers a few of the specialty badges but you will need to check with the camp director to see what specialties will be offered (based on instructor availability.) The camps have a history of filling up rapidly, so it is encouraged participants register as far in advance as possible). We have a very high percentage of "repeat campers" and often the people at the summer camps sign up for the following year before they leave camp!

For those unavailable to attend a DSA camp, encouraging a member of your troop to become a DSA evaluator for one or more of the specialty badges will help all members of your troop. If you are interested in pursuing this option, start by reading the info on the "Certification Program" page of the Dog Scout website. If you get a chance to go to a camp and want to become a DSE, let the camp director know so that, if possible, you can help instruct that badge activity. If you have enough scouts wanting a

particular specialty badge, you may be able to get a certified Dog Scout Evaluator to visit with your troop to do the testing.

“My dog has advanced agility titles through several sanctioning organizations. Wouldn’t that qualify him to get the agility badges?”

Not unless one of the sanctioning organizations was Dog Scouts of America. We could not give you the badge saying that you have passed agility training to OUR standards, unless you have passed through our testing authority. This would be like expecting AKC to automatically give you an agility title because you have a title in UKC. Though the standards for testing may be similar, each organization is responsible for administering its own test and conferring its own titles, degrees, certificates or badges.



“Should I charge troop dues?”

This is up to you and your troop members. Running a troop, particularly in the start up phase does have some expenses. Paper for flyers, printer ink or printing costs, space rental, booth rental at fundraisers, supplies for meetings/games/activities, postage, etc. can really add up. How much you charge (if you charge dues) is also up to you (up to \$12 per year per person). You will need to let the Certification Program Director know if you plan to charge dues, how much, how they will be assessed (per person, per household, per event, one time fee, etc.) and what the funds will be used to purchase.



Troop dues are in addition to the DSA dues, which have to be paid by troop members to participate at the troop level. You will need some way to keep track of troop dues that are paid by your troop members so the income and expenses can be reported on the end of the year report submitted to DSA.

“Is the troop automatically a non-profit group?”

No, each troop will need to apply for its own non-profit status with the government through DSA (if you choose to do so.) There is some initial paperwork and basic ongoing recordkeeping involved, and the troop needs someone committed to serving in the role of treasurer—but many troops have found that the benefits are well worth the work involved. Please see the section of this guidebook on “Optional Non-profit Status” for details and assistance.

“Can I open a bank account?”

If you want to open an account for the troop, you will likely need to either apply for non-profit status, or apply for a DBA (Doing Business As) or get a TIN (Tax ID Number). Counties and states vary in their requirements, so you should ask at your bank about how to open a troop account. It is highly recommended that more than one person have access to the account, just in case something were to happen to you.

“Do we have to pay anything to DSA?”

There is no fee to start a troop or be a troop leader. You and all of your troop members must be current members of Dog Scouts of America. Dues can be sent in to DSA national or paid on-line. If they have dogs they want to get a Cadet Scout title with and agree to be responsible owners and uphold the DSA laws, it is an additional \$5 for each Cadet Scout tag and title (optional). The only additional payments to DSA are for certifications (badges and titles) or other activities that are conducted which require administrative record keeping. If your troop has its own dues, those payments are separate from anything paid to DSA and each troop is responsible for the collection of and record keeping regarding troop dues.

“Can the troop members raise money for the troop if the troop is not a registered non-profit?”

Your local troop is affiliated in purpose only and is not considered a non-profit organization, with tax

deductible benefits, unless you complete the requirements to become a non-profit sub-group of DSA. One way to ensure any fundraising your troop does is both forthright and legal, is to raise funds by participating in DSA National fundraising campaigns, or to raise funds on behalf of other 501(c)(3) organizations (in both cases, with all funds going directly to an organization that does have 501(c)(3) status.

In any case, you must make it clear that while the national organization is an educational and charitable 501 (c) (3) non-profit foundation, your local troop is affiliated in purpose only, and any funds you raise for YOURSELVES is not a tax-deductible donation unless you have gotten charitable organization status with the IRS through DSA. If you choose to do a fund-raiser for one of the DSA national projects (like our Hike-a-thon), you may inform your donors that their contributions are tax deductible. If they want a receipt, one will be sent to them from the national office upon receipt of their payment provided the treasurer is made aware of the request for a receipt.

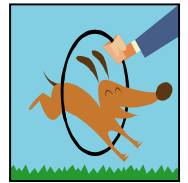
If you fill out the proper tax form to be non-profit and become a sub-group of the National Organization and are included in the group exemption letter, then donations collected for your troop are tax deductible (to the fullest extent of the law.) This is optional. There are links on the DSA “start a troop” page that walk you through this process if you want your troop to be a non-profit “sub-group” as part of DSA’s non-profit status.

If you are conducting a fundraising drive for another worthy cause, like the Meals-On-Wheels program, find out if that organization is recognized as a charity, so you can inform your donors whether or not their donation is a tax deduction.



“I don’t feel like I know enough about dog training to teach anyone else”

You may be just a normal, average person with a dog, or you may be the “dog person” or behavior expert in your local area. All kinds of different people will want to join your troop. Don’t be afraid to call on experts in your area or troop for help and advice. The DSA website can greatly help expand your knowledge with all the articles, how-to information and videos. The DSA talk list and Troop Leader talk list are two excellent resources to help you with questions you may have. If your area has a Regional Troop Mentor you can ask him or her to help you. The Certification Program Director is also another person you can ask for help.



You may find that although you don’t think you are very experienced, the people wanting to join the troop, by comparison, may be VERY inexperienced dog owners who will appreciate you sharing what you know. You can learn together. You will also learn more through helping others.

Part of being a Troop Leader is learning and teaching. Many people have learned more about dog training than they may have otherwise BECAUSE of their position as a troop leader! As the Leader, people may be asking you for answers to all kinds of dog questions and problems. You should take these questions as an opportunity to learn new things and expand your own education so that you can provide useful information to your troop members. We all started in a position of being “new to dogs” or new to a particular style of training, just let your troop know your limits and that you are willing to learn along with them by finding the answers. Then utilize the DSA website and talk list! The more you learn, the better trainer you’ll be for your own dog(s).

You should strive to continue to learn more and more about positive training methods and be able to help others with training issues using positive methods. There are lots of videos, books and websites devoted to positive training. Other leaders are also a wealth of knowledge and willing to help. Attending classes and seminars (if you can) is highly encouraged. Be sure to observe a class first to find out if they use leash corrections (not recommended) or clickers and treats (good) before you sign up! Many shelters offer classes as well for very reasonable rates. The DSA website and www.ClickerTraining.com all have excellent training info for free. The Clicker Training site also has video clips available (some free, most for under \$10) and there is a “training videos” page created for the DSA site of training videos created by DSA members.

Attending DSA leadership retreats and camps is another way to gain significant training knowledge. Until you feel confident, you may want to “buddy up” with someone who is knowledgeable about the subject you want to learn. Ask a clicker trainer if you can be a helper during his or her classes. Attend seminars if you can. Many training clubs have guest speakers come in and give presentations. Expand your horizons and take every opportunity that you can to learn new things. Also look into ways to improve your teaching abilities.



There are some people who have a wealth of knowledge, but aren't quite as experienced as others in being good teachers, able to share that knowledge with others. If this is you, do everything you can to practice and improve your presentation skills. Organizations like Toastmasters International can help you with your speaking skills (and fears) as well and the meetings are available all over the world! Books such as Coaching People to Train Their Dogs by Terry Ryan are made specifically for helping people develop the skill of teaching others about dog training—while these books may have been written mostly for professional dog trainers, the advice is great for volunteers too, and these types of books are often available at the library.

“OK, say I start a troop—what are my obligations to Dog Scouts of America?”

Our main requirement is that you conduct yourself in a way befitting the organization. You must agree with our mission, values and vision statements, promote responsible dog ownership, use and promote positive, reward-based training and be willing to share your knowledge. You will need to have earned the Dog Scout badge on your dog. You must encourage all of your troop members to obey the Dog Scout Laws and use positive training. You should not exclude anyone from joining your troop and look for ways to help each troop member improve the life of their dog. See the “Troop Leader” section earlier in this guidebook for more details on your responsibilities.

“Are there a lot of troops in the US?”

Our troop program is growing rapidly, and we hope to someday have troops all over the country in most communities and all over the world. You can see the number of troops currently in operation by visiting the Troop Locations page of the DSA website.



“What happens if the Leader has to move away, or for some reason can no longer be the leader of the troop?”

A troop needs a Troop Leader in order to remain active. This is a good reason to have a co-leader who is in training along with you. This person would be the natural choice to continue with leadership of the troop. If you don't have anyone who is able or willing to take on the leadership role, and no new person wants to begin the leadership training, then the troop would no longer be active. This would not affect the individual members. Their dogs would retain their status as Scouts (if they passed their test), and they would still be members of the national organization (if they keep their dues current.) They could still meet on a regular basis for hikes or training or other activities on their own.

“Do co-leaders have to go through the same steps as the leader?”

Yes, any co-leaders the troop may have will need to meet the same requirements as the Troop Leader. “Co-Leader” is just a term you can use if a troop has multiple Troop Leaders.

“How much time will I need to commit to running a troop?”

That depends on several factors, such as how active you want your troop to be, how much help you have, and how efficient you are at accomplishing the tasks you need to do. It also often takes more time and effort in the beginning, and can get easier as you both recruit more members and learn as you go. Here are a few comments:

- ◆ Ensure you read over all of the requirements in Section 2 of this Guidebook, so that you are familiar with what the required tasks are. You may find you'd like to do additional things, but this guidebook

will give you a good idea of what *needs* to be done.

- ♦ You'll want to have enough time to respond to both current and prospective troop members in a timely manner if they have questions, or have someone to delegate this task to.
- ♦ Planning to attend existing events (that are planned by someone else) together with your troop can ease your planning burden—such as charity walk-a-thons and other local dog-related events.
- ♦ Delegate! Don't be afraid to delegate work or authority. Most people are happy to help out as long as it is not always the same person who is doing all the work. While you have this common goal in mind, there may be some people who prefer to do some things more than others. Some of your members may wish to involve themselves with such things as developing a therapy dog visitation group, while others want to develop a "game night" for fun and to practice valuable "manners skills" with the dogs. Still others may be more interested in fundraising and others in the backpacking outings.



“Do I have to teach classes for free?”

No. If you are offering a class that is teaching people and their dogs a skill, such as a basic manners class or a “Dog Scout badge class” in which you are teaching people all the skills they need to earn the badge, you may charge a reasonable fee for this instruction. You may not, however, require that people take your classes in order to participate in the troop or to be tested for any badge. Troop activities and meetings should be separate from any for-profit classes or activities you teach that may happen to have a theme in common with Dog Scouts. (You will need to have at least the minimum required number of annual troop events as explained in this guidebook—that members do NOT have to pay instructor fees for, and you organize on a volunteer basis.)

“Can I require that troop members be a member of a particular group or club?”

DSA does not permit troops to be exclusive. You should not make it a requirement to also be affiliated with any other group. For example: “All members of this troop must also be a member of Wagging Tails Training Club.” We are not in favor of exclusivity or the formation or use of a troop to increase profit for a business. Dog Scouts is open to all breeds and mixes of dogs and all types of people. Your troop should not be operating to benefit a for-profit business like a training center - a training center or business may regularly volunteer their facility to host Troop activities, but any paid business that this happens to generate for the hosting business should be incidental, rather than marketing being a purpose of the troop's existence. Please be sure you have read and understand the troop policies page.

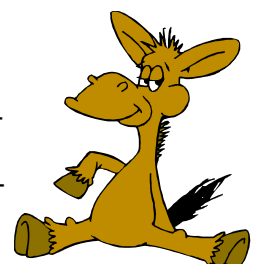
“How do I deal with a difficult person?”

There are many answers to this question—as a representative of DSA, one answer we always want to stress is “in a professional manner.” Please seek out the advice and experiences of other DSA leaders, when you come across a particularly difficult situation. Chances are, someone has already been in this situation and can help a great deal.

We embrace diversity, and realize that “People Vary.” That being said, we don't expect our Troop Leaders and Members to tolerate poor treatment from someone else. Often tact, kindness, and partnership with others can diffuse a situation. Troop policies can help prevent some conflicts. If these don't work, please ask for help, particularly if a person is displaying behavior that is making others uncomfortable, is illegal, discriminatory, or clashes with the DSA Mission and Values.

A few tips:

- ♦ Seek to truly understand the person's point of view. Often, even if you still disagree, the person will appreciate that you bothered to ask just what was bothering them, or why they disagree. This can help turn an argument back into a conversation. Try phrases like: “I'm sorry that you're so frustrated. Can you help me understand your point of view?” And: “I'm not sure whether I can do what you're asking, but I'm happy to listen.” Just stating that “I'd like to try to work this out” can



help a great deal.

- ◆ Don't take it personally. While Dog Scouts seems to attract the most wonderful of people, there will always be the person who you could pull out of the path of a speeding locomotive and they'd still be angry because you wrinkled their shirt. Setting a goal of *pleasing everyone, all the time* will set you up for frustration—control what you can control, do your best, listen to people's feedback, and make positive changes when you can.
- ◆ You may not be able to control another person's attitude, but you can control your own—choose your attitude, and make it a positive one, no matter what the other person's attitude is.
- ◆ Use the skills you learn with positive dog training!
 - ◆ Reinforce good behaviors! Find ways to reinforce people who are kind, patient, manage their dogs well, raise a concern in a respectful way, etc.. Thanking one troop member for being so patient waiting for their turn to try the agility tunnel sends a message to other troop members as to what behavior is encouraged, while making the patient person feel good.
 - ◆ Make it clear what it is you WANT people to do—explain ahead of time that there will be some waiting and the group will each get three turns, or remind everyone before a presentation starts: "let's remember all of the things we can do to keep our dogs clam and quiet during the presentation." You can even make a habit at the start of each activity of reviewing a few Dog Scout Laws, local policies, or just a few "good things to do at Troop Meetings."
- ◆ There is an excellent article on the "Start a troop" page about how to discuss things that are emotionally charged without the emotions causing additional issues.

How do I deal with someone using punishment-based methods?

Dog Scouts of America supports and recommends positive training methods, employing operant conditioning and positive reinforcement. You can post or refer to DSA's Position on Punishment, available on the DSA website to help people understand DSA's stance on this issue.

DSA is also an educational outreach organization—Sometimes you can help people see how positive training works, and convince them (in a non-confrontational, non-judgmental way) to try it. With your help, they may even become an active promoter of positive methods. Many DSA members and staff started with the old methods. If no one had taught them differently, they would likely still be using those methods.

There may be people that, no matter how tactful and helpful you are, they are unwilling to change their punitive, punishment-based methods—and if you make DSA's position clear they will often realize on their own that Dog Scouts is not for them. If you feel it's the only way, your troop may institute a policy that says "no choke chains are allowed at troop events". However, if you exclude the only training equipment a person knows before they even walk in the door, you won't be able to show them an alternative like a front attach harness and show them how to fit it so it works best and help them understand why a choke chain is not something DSA supports. In other words, you have missed a great opportunity to educate them and change their dog's life for the better.



"If I have questions, where do I get help?"

Help is right around the corner. As mentioned earlier, there are other Leaders who have been where you are now, who are willing to help with suggestions and advice, and even copies of the letters they have sent introducing their troop to the local veterinarians, media, and training organizations. DSA members have a variety of skills and professional expertise. Feel free to ask advice from other leaders and the administrators. Troop administration questions, and more confidential questions, can be asked on the Troop Leaders Yahoo group. General dog training questions should be posted to the main talk-list because you'll get lots of great help and usually a few different perspectives and suggestions.

**If your question was not answered here,
please contact the Certification Program Director.**

Section Three: Understanding DSA Programs



What DSA offers and provides to its members and leaders

Dog Scouts of America offers many national programs, as well as supporting troops and individual members in local community programs. The following is a brief explanation of the programs that DSA provides and supports. If you would like more information about these programs, check the DSA website or contact another troop leader that is working on the project.

What DSA does for its leaders and members:

- ** DSA publishes training manuals, periodic articles and a newsletter to disseminate information about the wonderful things people and dogs are doing or can do together to promote the human/canine bond.
- ** Develop the troop program so that members can have troops to join
- ** Development of the leadership program and Distance Learning Program so people can learn badge activities and earn badges outside of camp
- ** Train the troop leader at no cost to the leader or the troop through web based guidebooks, web pages, phone consultations, email support and in-person leadership camp. When possible, in person help is offered by other near-by troop leaders.
- ** After the Scoutmasters and Evaluators are trained, DSA pays them 5 dollars for every certification they do (after a 5 badge practicum).
- ** Offer a free website with video and text answers to training problems, information about many dog activities, training help and other wonderful information. The website can be used as a reference, learning tool and training guide by leaders, members and the general public.
- ** Administrators spend their free time trying to figure out how they can reward motivated troops and individuals with recognition
- ** To give recognition DSA uses a merit badge system to honor the learning and training achievements of the dog and handler
- ** DSA gives community service awards to people who have consistently and repeatedly distinguished themselves as examples of responsible dog owners, and by introducing others to humane education.
- ** DSA will also give the "Good Scout" award and the "Above And Beyond" award to people who help promote humane education on a regular and ongoing basis
- ** Develop new badges, so that the troops can have fun and educational goals to work toward together
- ** Publish the DSA newsletter to keep members informed and share educational tidbits. This includes the "troop scoop" to keep people informed about what the troops are doing. Be sure to submit your troop's news!
- ** Offer a discussion list that is open to the public to exchange ideas of interest to other responsible dog owners. http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/DSA_TalkList

** Offer a troop Leaders discussion list so Leaders can help each other and communicate with DSA to help improve all that DSA has to offer.

** Administrators give their time for free to develop new programs that make Dog Scouts opportunities more available world wide.

** Administrators available - for free (and volunteering their own time)- to offer helpful advice and training as problems arise regarding leadership issues (how to find places to have meetings, what to set up at a booth, how to deal with problem troop members, what to do if XYZ happens during a certification, etc.)

** Troops benefit from all advertising done by DSA national, including newspaper articles, TV spots/shows, interviews, booths at fairs, and much more.

** Free advice and training available on various activities that can be done by a troop like fundraising (and teaching the fundraising behaviors to the dogs), various outings and the badge activities- even if they are just done for fun. Bite prevention presentations, dog care for kids, reading to dogs program, etc. By demonstrating to others how dogs can easily be trained with kindness, fairness and patience rather than domination, force and intimidation, more people will become responsible and will not give up their dog to the pound at the first sign of a behavior problem.

** Specialty programs developed by people giving of their own time like:

- ◆ The Jr. Scout kids program
- ◆ The worldwide Dog Scout test/title (& specialty badges)
- ◆ Bite Prevention education
- ◆ Scholarships for camp
- ◆ Development of many of the articles and pages on the website
- ◆ Troop Recognition Program

** DSA makes the entire camp facility in Michigan available to any Dog Scout member and to any troop that wants to use it (by reservation please.)

** Offer multi-level pack dog patches and titles for members including all the record keeping that goes along with this program.

** Lots of wonderful, helpful, willing people to make everyone's experience with DSA the best it can be!

** Offers week-long camps, 3-4 day mini camps and a 3-day leadership retreat. These are a great way to learn more about the DSA philosophy and training while meeting other like-minded "dog people." Satellite mini-camps are also offered in other locations like Dallas/Ft. Worth TX. DSA will help large troops set-up their own mini camp to bring the DSA camp to their area if enough interest and the proper location exists.

** Free Spring, Fall and Winter outings at the camp facility in MI. Each year DSA hosts these fun get-togethers that are free to DSA members. Meals are brought and prepared by the attendees and lodging is available on-site or in town for a low price. Watch the DSA discussion list and newsletter for the announcement of the dates for the next outings.

Educational Programs of DSA:

There are many ways that DSA educates the public, its members and its leaders.

The website (www.DogScouts.org) - the wealth of information that can be found on the DSA website is staggering. New information is being added regularly and making the information as accessible as possible is a high priority. If you have questions about the organization, dog training, dog care or just about anything relating to dogs it can likely be found there. If it is not on there and you think it should be, please let us know. Various DSA members contributed many of the web pages so if you have knowledge to share, please let us know that too.

The DSA newsletter – It is full of interesting articles, troop activities and information about the new things that are happening within the organization. It can be found in the “newsletter” section of the DSA website.

Public DSA Discussion List- This is an email format for people to share stories, ideas, news, questions, answers and comments about dogs. To subscribe to the DSA Discussion List, you can go to: http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/DSA_TalkList/ and click on “Join this group”. Then follow the instructions to create a free user account.

Membership Program- Anyone that wants to help support DSA can become a member. There are various levels of membership that people can use to show their support. The Individual and Family Memberships provide basic membership perks. These include the potential for troop membership, access to the DSA facility (by reservation), free outings at the DSA camp for members, leadership training, the potential to earn merit badges, insurance at DSA events, and more. The Contributing and Sustaining memberships get the same membership perks as well as knowing that your contributions are helping to fund many of the educational programs that DSA offers. These programs would not be possible without these members and the generous donations of other DSA supporters.

DSA Youth Programs The future of our canine friends, dog sports and activities and the Dog Scouts of America organization truly lies with today’s youth! To encourage our younger generation to become responsible dog owners and to participate in a wide variety of activities with their dogs, DSA now offers a Junior Dog Scout badge to youth members ages 6 to 17. The Junior Dog Scout program offers our young members an opportunity to earn a Jr. Scout badge through local Dog Scout troops, by video or at summer DSA camps. Members in the age 6-17 group should attempt the Jr. Dog Scout badge rather than the adult Dog Scout badge. It should be noted that children 6 years of age or younger will receive a Certificate of Achievement and will be observed – but not actually be tested – in the Jr. Dog Scout program; this youngest group will not be eligible for merit badges until they reach the age of seven. For more info: http://www.dogscouts.org/Kids_and_dogs_section.html

This is a wonderful program for our young members to become involved with. It teaches responsibility and some very important life lessons. It helps build self-esteem and how to reach success with goal-oriented steps. Because our youth members are not usually in a position to make decisions, like whether the dog will live inside or out, whether or not to fence the backyard or if/when the family dog will be spayed or neutered, they are not able to take the Dog Scout test until they are 18. But members of any age can train the dog and learn all that he or she can to become a future responsible owner. Some of our Dog Scout Troops actually cater to youth members and consist of adult dog trainers mentoring kids. There are special membership options for troops that cater to youth members.

The World Wide Dog Scout Certification- This program was started in 2005 and makes it possible for people to get the Dog Scout title (and other badges) on their dog without having to come to camp or find a Scoutmaster. Through a series of video taped sessions and a written assessment of the owner’s knowledge, the dog can get his or her Dog Scout title regardless of where the dog and owner

live on the planet. The guidelines and steps to be followed to utilize this program are found in the free, downloadable "Guide to the Dog Scout title" which is on the DSA website. For reference there is also an example video of the dog's portion of the test on the "Badges" page of the DSA website.

Teachers and Educators Resources (Educational Outreach Program)- Children are an important resource: They are the leaders, lawmakers, teachers, and owners of tomorrow. The better the crop of kids we bring up today, the better place the world will be tomorrow. Dogs can play an important part in teaching children values, nurturing, respect, and love, which lead to the development of desirable character traits, and high self-esteem in the child. Children growing up with these values and character traits will not be likely to choose a path of self-destruction, or become blights on society. For the preservation of humanity, it is important that those of us who can, help out in any way we can to help children develop to their full potential. DSA members around the country have been becoming more active in our educational outreach program. The fact remains that there are lots of kids to reach, and not enough of us to reach all of the schools. This part of the web site is for sharing information with teachers who see the kids every day, and have a greater possibility of having a profound effect on a daily basis. http://www.dogscouts.org/Community_Fundraising.html

Bite prevention information can be found here:
http://www.dogscouts.org/Kids_and_dogs_section.html

Scholarships for camp - Each year, Dog Scouts of America offers a scholarship to attend Dog Scout Camp. The scholarship is in honor of all the Scouts who passed away and are now in the Rainbow Bridge troop. The criterion for the scholarship is that a letter be sent to DSA showing the camper has a financial need, that the dog is somehow particularly deserving of getting a trip to camp and that the financial burden of the owner is related to the medical care of the dog. For more info, visit: http://www.dogscouts.org/Memorial_Scholarship.html

Dog Scout camp- Dog Scout Camp is for dog owners who want to become more involved with their dogs and their community and want to learn fun new things. The Dog Scout Motto is "Let us learn new things, so that we may become more helpful." DSA sponsors 6-day (5 night) camps each year, where you and your dog can come to learn fun and functional new skills like: Agility, Backpacking, Water Safety, Rally Obedience, The Art of Shaping, Safe Travel, Frisbee, Disaster Preparedness, Basic Canine Manners, Freestyle Dance, Carting, First Aid, Lure Coursing, and other dog sports and activities. There are also a wide range of class topics such as wolf behavior and how it differs from a dog's behavior, canine conditioning, and letterboxing. You will have the opportunity to learn how to shape your dog's behavior to teach him to paint! With your help, the dog will create a painting, which can be matted and taken home for framing, and you will have learned valuable training skills while having fun! And, you can earn merit badges for completing the requirement for these various activities, once you and your dog have passed the test to become a Dog Scout. For more info: http://www.dogscouts.org/Camp_Info.html

DSA Bell Ringing for Salvation Army (see also item #14)- Bell ringing for the Salvation Army is one of the most rewarding activities that Dog Scout groups participate in. It provides an opportunity for DSA members to serve their community, show off their dogs' skills, and share the message of responsible dog ownership. Teaching your dog to take a donation from someone and drop it into a bucket- or- to hold a basket or bucket while people drop in their donations, can greatly increase the amount collected for the non-profit charity of your choice. For more information: http://www.dogscouts.org/Community_Fundraising.html

Dog Scout troops – DSA provides the training and education people need to become troop leaders. To assist leaders, this guide, the many pages of the DSA website and people dedicated to the formation, growth and success of troops are available. For more information: http://www.dogscouts.org/Start_a_troop.html

Community Education - As a public service, we provide information on a community level wherever and

whenever possible in a number of ways: Informational booths at pet fairs, walk-a-thons, and other public events allow us to reach the community on a person-to-person level. Our helpful pamphlets on responsible dog ownership, everyday training, safe travel and positive reinforcement help people relate to their dog in a better way. Bite prevention information and other general information about dog care and selection is also available to optimize the relationship between the family and the dog and make it one that will be a commitment for the lifetime of the dog. Special events, like art shows, demonstrations of various dog activities, in-services and seminars made available to the community allow people to see the value of a great relationship between the dog and the family it lives with. Local DSA Troops conduct many of these community events and activities.

Fundraisers- DSA, troops and individual members are involved in many different fundraisers for both national programs and local organizations. Fundraisers have been held to support DSA, to support a troop program or outing, to provide a bullet proof vest to a local police K9, to provide food/toys/ supplies to the pets of meals-on-wheels recipients, to get oxygen masks for animals to be used by local fire departments, for Salvation Army, and to help many local shelters and breed rescues across the U.S. There is some information on the Dog Scout website regarding starting a fundraiser in your area. If you don't find what you need, just ask! http://www.dogscouts.org/Community_Fundraising.html

There is also a video of some fundraising dogs in action on the training videos page: http://www.dogscouts.org/Training_Videos.html



Coyote puts a donation into the bucket during a fundraiser for Police K9's

The Leadership Training Retreat: for Troop Leaders, Scoutmasters & Evaluators

Part of the leadership training can happen at the annual Dog Scout Camps, and it can also go on independently by video. But another important DSA leadership training program is the leadership training retreats. These Leader Retreats are usually held at Dog Scout Camp in St. Helen, Michigan each May. While attendance is not mandatory to be a leader, it is recommended if possible. Anyone in your troop that is helping with a leadership role can attend.

The retreats will feature several important things for our instructors. Leader Retreats are designed to provide an avenue for leaders to practice their class teaching skills on a group that will be helpful and constructive (other leaders in various stages of leadership training.) Leader Retreats offer new leaders a chance to meet others who have been in the same situations with the same questions. Each Retreat has a variety of networking opportunities, where leaders of all experience levels learn from one another in a cooperative environment. The relaxed and friendly atmosphere makes learning fun.

Leader Retreat attendees consist of Troop Leaders, camp instructors and staff, and future leaders desiring leadership training. Each attendee will have the opportunity to provide instruction to the other attendees on a dog training or troop related topic. Often, one or more badge activities are presented, which leaders can then share as a fun troop activity upon their return home. You will get an introduction to the Dog Scout Way and find support and friendship in your fellow leaders.

Troop recognition program

The Troop Recognition Program Guidelines

The Troop Recognition Program runs from Jan 1 through Dec 31 each year. The optional program consists of various activities for which the troop can accumulate points. Recognition would be given for reaching a certain level of points within the year. Most of the activities focus on troop member achievements and troop growth. This focus of this program is to reward troops for being active and helping in their communities, not for competition between troops!

The areas selected are important for several reasons. The new members tally is a reward for growth and number of events with a booth/table shows that the troop is trying to reach more people. The badges earned are tangible measures of a troop's success in helping its members learn new skills. The numbers of community service hours the troop members contribute to their communities and the funds raised are a measure of the troop's community service attitude. The number of seminars attended, troop meetings, camp attendance and leadership retreat attendance helps measure the troop's commitment to education for its members. A break down of these activities and their point earning rules is found below.

Any troop with an assigned troop number can choose to participate in this program. A troop should continually strive to bring in new troop members to make earning points easier and to combat the natural turn over in membership. New members also help bring a flow of new ideas and personalities.

The Certification Program Director (or person designated by the CPD) will keep track of the troop's standings by means of year-end reports due by December 31st each year. **Reports received after Dec 31st will not be considered** so please be on time. The blank *record keeping form* will be available on a website for download/printing by the leaders and to be filled in during the reporting year. A reporting form will also be available on the website to be used to collect the total numbers/points for the troop. These forms can be returned to the CPD by email or postal mail before December 31st. Point earning is based on the information found on the Start a troop page of the website regarding this program.

NOTE: For troops not wishing to participate in this program, an abbreviated reporting form can be used to submit your troop's report at the end of the year. **Each troop MUST submit either the abbreviated form or the Troop Recognition Program form/info.**

Section Four: Understanding the Merit Badge System



Is my dog a Dog Scout?

Simply being a paid member of Dog Scouts of America does not automatically make your dog a Dog Scout. Until you and your dog have passed the Dog Scout certification criteria in front of a certified Scoutmaster or by video, your title (as the owner) is “Member of DSA.”

However, you do have the option to get the “Cadet Scout” title on your dog prior to passing the Dog Scout test. This option started in the summer of 2006. This title is honorary and shows your commitment to work with your dog so they can be a welcome member of society or even pass the Dog Scout test in the future. It also represents your commitment to responsible dog ownership and you can call your dog a Cadet Scout. There is a \$5 fee that can be paid for any dog in your care. This \$5 covers the production and mailing of the Cadet Scout collar tag and the record keeping associated with this title. Once you get the collar tag, you can then call yourself a Cadet Scout owner.



Once you have passed the certification to become a Dog Scout, and you have submitted your forms and fees, you become “a Dog Scout owner” and the dog can use the title of “Dog Scout” and place the letters DSA after his or her name. Please read below for more information about the Dog Scout title and what that honor entails.

When you pass the certification and your dog becomes a Dog Scout, your dog will receive:

- ◆ His/her official red DSA bandana
- ◆ Official DSA photo I.D. card
- ◆ His/her first merit badge, the oval “Dog Scout” badge, indicating that your dog has passed the requirements for exemplary behavior necessary to be a Dog Scout.

Specialty badges

As a Dog Scout, your dog is now eligible to earn more merit badges. The easiest way to earn them is to come to Dog Scout Camp, where we have instructors to teach you a variety of activities and certify you and your dog. There are also a number of badges that you can work on outside of camp without the need for a video. If you cannot arrange to come to Dog Scout Camp, you can earn badges outside of camp if you can get a certified Dog Scout Evaluator in your area to verify your achievements and sign off on your merit badge form. Another option is for you to use video recording to show the steps you used to teach the dog his/her behaviors and show each of the steps on the check-off sheet for the badge. For the owner’s part of the badge, you will need to show on tape or in writing that you understand all of the owner’s responsibilities to earn the badge. The merit badge forms and check-off sheets are available on the DSA website, free for you to download for your own use.

If you wish to work on some of the badges, but you do not have a certified Dog Scout Evaluator in your area (and don’t want to video tape), please go ahead and learn to perform the skills and get the experience necessary to earn these badges.

As our organization grows, there will be more and more Evaluators trained to administer and certify a wider array of badges and if you have already completed the work all you have to do is to demonstrate to the Evaluator that you have trained the dog in the manner prescribed by DSA and done so with safety and concern for your dog. Both you and the certifying Evaluator have to sign a form testifying to the fact that this has been done and they have personally observed this (you may be asked to demonstrate key points from your check-off sheet if the Evaluator has not observed you performing them.) Community Service, Clean up America 1 and 2, Therapy Work, Letterboxing 1, 2 & 3, Geocaching 1, 2 & 3 and Temperament Tested are several badges that you can work on outside of camp without a video using the honor system and log sheets.

Badge fees

There is a fee of \$25.00 for each specialty badge you would like to earn. \$20 will be paid to DSA and \$5 will be paid (by DSA) to the Evaluator (or the person reviewing the video.) The badge fee covers the Evaluator's time, the cost of processing your merit badge form and entering it into the computer data base as a permanent record that your dog has earned the badge on the completion date; the equipment used at camp for the badge; the merit badge and the cost of shipping it to you; and administrative costs, which include everything from providing the training that your Evaluator received, to developing the criteria for each badge, creating and commissioning the artwork for the embroidered patches, making the forms available online and other office details.

The badge fees do not include any training fees or classes that may be offered to you to prepare and train you and your dog for the achievement of the badges. If your Troop Leader or Evaluator offers these classes, they are totally separate from the certification process and any fees charged are paid directly to the person providing this training.

Badge training

If you are seeking training expressly for the purpose of attaining badges you might want to inquire as to whether the person offering the instruction has been certified (or is in the process of being certified) by DSA to evaluate you for the badge. Many of our Leaders are qualified to teach a number of activities but if they are not yet certified by DSA to sign off on badge forms you won't be able to get the badge until they do (unless you send in video).

We don't want you to mistakenly think that the training equals the earning of the badge. We at DSA feel that new kinds of training and experience is always valuable and you should strive to learn all you can even if it means you might not get a chance to prove it to someone with the ability to certify you until a later date. By a later date we mean that someone in your area may, in the future, be approved to administer additional badges or you may get a chance to attend a camp, mini-camp, or outing, where you can demonstrate to a certified Evaluator that you and your dog have completed your badge requirements or you may have an opportunity to be recorded on video.

Uniform

Once your dog earns the title of Dog Scout your dog is eligible to wear the special Dog Scout Uniform. If you would like to order one, on which to display your badges, please visit the DSA store on-line. Please only purchase the uniform if your dog HAS the Dog Scout title (this will be verified by the store manager). We do our best to verify that status before shipping a uniform or other "Dog Scouts only" gear.

Extra Patches/Bandanas

You may also purchase duplicates of any of the badges your dog has earned, so that you can place them on his or her backpack, uniform, bandana or crate cover. Duplicate patches are \$3.00 each, plus \$2.00 postage and handling. You may also order additional Dog Scout bandanas for \$5.00 each. If you have a small dog, DSA offers a "scooped" bandana that is cut smaller and made to better fit a small dog. These are available for an additional \$3 when you submit your Dog Scout form. Simply check mark the box next to the "scooped bandana" and include the extra fee that covers the cost of cutting and sewing the smaller bandanas.

Replacement ID cards

If you lose your dog's I.D. card or have a change of address or other information and you wish to get a replacement DSA photo I.D. card, you may purchase a new one for \$5.00. Contact the Recognition Department for details on how to get the information to the administrator.

Please don't impersonate

Your DSA photo I.D. badge makes your Dog Scout look very “official,” especially if he or she is also wearing a Dog Scout uniform. While your dog IS special, we do not want anyone to mistake the Dog Scout identification for anything but what it is: a testament to your dog's good training and exemplary behavior. If this will get store owners or hotels to allow your dog into their establishment, then hooray for our commitment to training and responsible ownership! Conduct yourselves in a Dog Scoutly manner and be glad that someone recognized the value of a well-mannered and trustworthy dog on a leash held by a responsible dog owner. However, please make it very clear that this does not legally entitle your dog to any special privileges, such as those afforded a service dog, and for you to try to mislead anyone (it's not hard--most people are ignorant of the service dog laws and would just let in any dog with any kind of “title” and accompanying I.D.) would be a misuse of your dog's certification and cause for revocation of your dog's title. Many times, after explaining the nature of the DSA certification, dogs have been allowed access on those merits alone. Please do not take advantage of situations where an ignorant person may not understand the difference between a dog which has a legal right to be anywhere with his owner, and a dog which is basically safe to have in public because his friendly nature and good manners have been certified by passing a test.

Lapsed membership

If you let your membership lapse, your dog will continue to be a Dog Scout (if they have been certified.) But you will no longer get the membership benefits like the eligibility to earn more badges, participate in a troop, free outings, etc.

Recertification

If you notice, your dog's I.D. card has a date of certification. We would like you to self-evaluate your dog on an on-going basis to be sure the two of you are still maintaining your training and practicing the Dog Scout Laws. This way, your dog's card will expire if you do not continue to be examples of responsible dog ownership. However, no dog will have his DSA status removed solely because the owner did not renew the card in five years. Some dogs get too old to return to camp or find themselves in an area of the country where it is not easy to find someone who can re-certify them. This policy is mainly to prevent those rare, worst possible scenarios, where someone gets a dog certified by some miracle, disappears into the woodwork and for all we know they could be acting irresponsibly with their dog, like having blatant disregard for leash laws, or letting their dog act aggressively towards people or other dogs. Disregard for the Dog Scout Way and Responsible Ownership can result in revocation of the Dog Scout title and DSA membership without reimbursement.

Revocation

The I.D. card also indicates that DSA has the right to revoke a certification at its discretion. If your dog were to prove itself a menace to society, or unsafe around humans or other dogs, we would not want him or her out in public, posing a danger, and portraying a bad image of Dog Scouts in general. These provisions were set in place to protect all of us responsible dog owners who have well-behaved Scouts from being associated with the rare individual who may not continue to act responsibly.

Continued membership is not a requirement to keep the Dog Scout title

However, it is a very good idea, because with your membership, you will continue to be eligible to join in local troop activities. You will be eligible to earn additional Dog Scout Merit Badges, Pack Dog Titles and participate in other DSA membership programs and Dog Scout outings. If you maintain your membership, you will not “disappear into the woodwork.” We will know that you have an ongoing commitment to our goals and mission and your dues will help us continue the DSA mission.

Dog Scouts of America is a non-profit, 501 (c) (3) charitable organization. Our mission is to improve the lives of dogs, their owners, and society through humane education, positive training, and community involvement.

As a member of Dog Scouts of America, with your certified Dog Scout, we hope that you will provide an example of the joys of responsible dog ownership and the mutually beneficial bond you have formed with your dog as a member of your family. We hope you will continue to learn new things together to increase your capabilities and confidence levels and to enrich your lives together.

Thank-you for your commitment to DSA! If you have any questions about something in this guidebook, please ask! DSA strives to support its leaders and members in any way we can. If you have ideas or suggestions for improvement, please share them with the Certification Program Director or on the Troop Leader discussion list. The Troop Leader program is always evolving and improving as new people and new ideas come forth.





DOG SCOUTS OF AMERICA

www.dogscouts.org