

Introduction

Organising a County Venture Forum can be trickier than it seems, and getting the most from it can be trickier still. In this straightforward guide, which does its best to reflect modern Venturing, you will find information on how to use your forum as a place for evaluation and for decision making. You will need to apply this document and its recommendations to the situation of your Scout County, its stage of development, its needs and its priorities. All of this is predicated on that part of the Scout Method which stresses progressive self representation and increasing opportunities for leadership.

Fundamentals

What is a County Venture Forum?

* An event run by Young People in partnership with the County Programme Coordinator

What is County Venture Forum for?

- * To elect representatives to the County Board and National Youth Forum
- * To elect a County Venture Scout Committee
- * Allow Venture Scouts have their say on all issues that affect them and to formulate proposals to bring to the County Board and to the National Forum
- * To evaluate the County's programme
- * To form a network of Venture Scouts within the Scout County
- * To facilitate youth participation
- * To allow Venture Scouts to learn the skills to meaningfully play a part in decision making.

Who?

- * That's up to you - it may be in the best interests of your county to have only 2 or 3 per group if you have lots of groups, however, the more people attend, the more opinions you will get. A minimum of 2 per group should be invited and there is no maximum limit.
- * The CPC should also attend, as should Venture Scouters, when appropriate

Planning – a sample timeline

Step 1: Initial Meeting – 6 weeks before the forum

The County Programme Coordinator should invite the existing County Venture Scout Committee (if it exists) or otherwise a representative from each Venture Group for a special meeting. Each Venture Executive should elect this representative. At this meeting they will form the initial plan, also the Venture reps should get their Venture Groups talking about issues which are important to them as young people both in and outside of Scouting.

Step 2: The Next Meeting – 4 Weeks before the forum

At this meeting you should agree on details, send out information to Groups, discuss the programme, request for Discussion Topics and ask for volunteers to facilitate discussions at the forum.



Step 3: The Next Meeting – 2 Weeks before the forum

At this meeting you should know what the discussion topics will be and who is hosting each one. Also the programme should be finalised with games and activities decided and delegated to people to run.

Step 4: The Week before hand

The County Programme Coordinator or someone appointed by him/her should check up on everyone and make sure all arrangements are in place.

Step 5: The Forum

All the organisers to meet beforehand and run over everything before the delegates arrive.

Step 6: Post-Forum Evaluation

At this meeting the organisers should review the activity and make recommendations for the following year. Also this meeting should include a celebration aspect.

Practicalities**1.1 Questions to which you should have answered YES, before you leave...**

- * Has the county's role in Venture Scouting (event programme, programme support materials, support to new or struggling groups, leadership support, training participation etc) since your last forum been evaluated?
- * Have suggestions been made based on the evaluation?
- * Have you established what the Venture Scouts' expectation of the CPC is for the coming year?
- * Has the CPC made his/her expectations of the Venture Scouts' clear?
- * Has everyone has his/her say?
- * Has a plan for forthcoming projects been made and agreed on?
- * Have all discussions been conducted in an open and respectful manner?
- * Have the county's delegates to the national forum been decided in a manner acceptable to all present?
- * Has everyone left with something?
- * Did everyone learn everyone else's name?
- * Was it enjoyable?
- * Has a date for the next forum been picked?

1.2 Ways to increase numbers at your County Forum

- * Tie it to another event, it can be anything from a cinema trip to a climb, use your imagination
- * Make sure groups know what's expected of them as regards ideas & commitments before they come
- * Make it fun, ask each group along with their ideas to bring a cake, or a bar of chocolate to share, or something similar, use your imagination...
- * Inform Group Leaders, Venture Leaders and Venture Scouts about the time and date of the forum as far in advance as you can, and remind them...



1.3 How to conduct evaluation

A – What questions to ask

What has been done since the last forum? Why was it done? Has it been successful? Was it inline with the Scout Method and our educational objectives? Did everyone try their best? If you were to do it again what would you change?

B- What method to use

Option 1: Allow each group to submit its thoughts before the meeting and discuss them on the day

Option 2: Give everyone a series of post-it notes on the day and let them use those to write evaluations (this ensures honesty, and keeps thoughts brief too)

Option 3: Devise a survey

Option 4: Have a simple, mediated roundtable discussion

1.4 Leaving with something

Everyone should leave the event with something, be it someone's phone number to arrange a joint event, information about a national event, a website address for programme resources, contact details for the man arranging the tidy towns, the best place to buy cheap equipment locally etc...

Components of the Forum

The Forum is made of three main parts: Introduction, Discussion Sessions and Formal Session. The Introduction section will set the tone for the event so it is important that effort is put into making the beginning fun and inclusive while also outlining that there is work to be done. The Discussion Groups is where most of the work of the Forum will be done. And to conclude, the brief Formal section involves the actual voting on motions and elections to various posts.

2.1 Introduction

Gathering and Socialising

It is important that an effort is made from the beginning of the Forum to ensure that the participants mix. The success of this event is based on the Venture Scouts' discussions, so an informal fun-based model of interaction should be encouraged.

Opening

An attempt should be made to have a formal opening ceremony which sets the tone for the Forum – fun but with work to get done. You may consider an opening thought (see appendix), a keynote speaker to give a very short speech (eg the County Commissioner, a local TD, an inspirational local Scouter/former Venture Scout etc) or another similar ceremony appropriate to your county.

Introduction

Briefly explain what is involved in the forum. It is important that all participants are aware of what the forum is and how it works.



Ice-Breaker Games

A number of games or activities should be run at the beginning of the forum to help the participants to interact and to help get them to know each other. See the appendix for samples.

2.2 Group Discussions

2.2.1 What?

These sessions are the most important part of the Forum and every effort should be made to make them a success. A number of discussion sessions can be run at once and the participants should rotate between them.

The participants should be divided into groups for the discussion sessions. The groups should be made up of Venture Scouts from different groups to ensure deliberations which are productive and varied. Also, if required there should be a mix of gender and age.

These sessions should be facilitated by a suitable Scouter, ideally a younger leader, who can encourage and foster discussion. Alternatively, each Venture Scout Group Unit could host a discussion group of their choice on an issue that affects them either within or outside Scouting.

2.2.2 Motions and Concepts/Ideas

These discussions should be noted and the any conclusions should be listed and arranged as a motion for the Forum. These motions shall take several forms and will be brought to the appropriate level:

- * Group related motions will brought back to groups
- * County Programme motions will be addressed by the CPC and County Venture Scout reps
- * General County related motions will be brought to the Scout County Board
- * National related Concepts/Ideas will be brought by the County Reps to the National Youth Forum.

2.2.3 Decision of Discussion Topics

The major topics for discussion should, where possible, be selected in advance of the forum. The participants themselves should be invited to propose suitable major topics to discuss. The Venture Scout organisers and the CPC should correlate the different suggestions into several working areas which will form the basis for most of the Forum.

One approach for getting suggestions is to ask Venture Scout Groups or their representatives to list the five most important issues facing them as individuals and another five as the most important issues facing Scouting or their community. The subjects for discussion should be selected from their responses.

Venture Scout Representatives should be informed as early as possible of the subjects that will be on the Forum agenda. This will give the participants time to discuss the subjects within their own groups, thus enabling them to properly represent the views of others.



In the case where Venture groups are hosting the discussion sessions, the organisers will have to coordinate the topics and make sure that there is sufficient mixture of subjects and no crossovers. It would also be wise to agree on a specific format.

2.3 Formal Session

Although being labelled the Formal Session it is important that this section is run in an interesting and relatively flexible way.

2.3.1 County Venture Scout reps Annual Report

The Venture Scout Committee (where present) should present its annual report to the Forum. There is no need for this to be a complicated or lengthy document; it should just simply and concisely summarise what they did over the year and make recommendations.

2.3.2 Agreement on County Motions and Concepts/Ideas

The Motions and Concepts/Ideas which came out of the discussion groups should be agreed upon.

2.3.3 Outline of County Plan

All County Motions should briefly formalised into an outline of plan for the work of the Scout County Venture Scout Committee in the forthcoming year.

2.3.4 Appoint of new the Venture Scout Committee

Each Venture Group nominates two representatives to make up the new County Venture Scout Committee; the Forum then formally ratifies these nominations.

2.3.5 Elections

The Forum should elect:

- * The Chairperson of the County Venture Scout Committee
- * The Secretary of the County Venture Scout Committee
- * Three County Representatives to the National Youth Forum
- * Representatives to the County Board

2.3.6 Closing

A short closing ceremony should be held which should ties elements of the Forum together and send people away enthused.

Suggested Forum Programme:

Pre Forum Gathering and Socialising

0:00 Opening

0:10 Introduction to Forum, Agenda and Working Methods

0:15 Ice-breaker Games

0:40 Decision of Discussion Topics

0:45 Discussion Sessions

2:15 Formal Session:

County Venture Scout Committee Annual Report

Agreement on Motions



Outline of County Plan
Appoint of new County Venture Scout Committee
Elections
2:45 Closing

Anything else?

3.1 Pre-Forum Group Preparations

For the event to be a success it is essential that each Venture Scout Executive prepares for the Forum. It is within each Programme Section that most important and beneficial Youth Involvement occurs.

3.2 National Youth Fora

The National Youth Forum for Ventures is run simultaneously with the National Youth Forum for Scouts, usually in April. Each Scout County is entitled to send three Scout and three Venture Scout delegates to the National Youth Fora.

It is important that the Scout County Delegates bring forward general concepts/ideas for discussion at the Forum. These concepts/ideas will be discussed by Youth Members from across the country and formulated into motions for the Forum.

Also, Scout County Delegates are eligible for election as a National Youth Representative, in accordance with the job description.

It is the responsibility of the County Programme Coordinator to ensure that the delegates chosen to attend the National Youth Forum are prepared for it and should provide all assistance needed.

Another concept

The Scout County can have a County Forum on a night in a local Den or, if feeling adventurous, it may choose a weekend option.

If the Forum is run as a weekend in an activity centre, then attendance and the benefit to youth members can be wider. The Forum can be now be advertised and run as a "County Venture Scout Forum & Activity Weekend."

A sample weekend programme

- * **Friday** Arrival check in, icebreakers & a night hike
- * **Saturday morning** Introduction to the concept of the Forum, and to the organisers. Discussion Groups as outlined in 2.2.
- * **Saturday afternoon** Rock-climbing, kayaking, caving, whatever your imagination can conjure and your county can provide...



* **Saturday night** Information presented on National Events, badges/ awards/ initiatives, service projects, expeditions... whatever is relevant to the County at its stage of development. Explain that the Reps to the County Board and National Forum will be elected in the morning. This allows Venture Scouts to speak to potential candidates before the elections on Sunday

* **Sunday morning** Formal session as in 2.3.



Appendices

- A1 - Ice Breaker Games
- A2 - Evaluation Games
- A3 - Possible Discussion Topics
- A4 - Some Opening Thoughts

A1 - Ice Breaker Games

Ice Breaker 1 - First Impressions Game

This is a fun game that involves writing your first impression of someone you meet. If some people already know each other, that's fine too — people can simply write some nice, encouraging words or adjectives to describe each other. This works well as an icebreaker for meetings, when there are new people present, or when people don't know each other well. It can be entertaining as a party game, too.

To set up First Impressions, pass out the large sheets of paper and writing utensils. Have each person write their name on the top of a sheet of paper. Tape each person's sheet to their back so that they can't see it. Instruct everyone to mingle with each other and to converse. Tell everyone to say hello and to introduce each other for a few moments. After a minute or so, ask each person to write an adjective (their "first impression" of the person they just spoke with) on each other's papers. Then have each person continue mingling with new people, repeating the process. After 10-20 minutes (depending on how large your group is and how long you want this activity to run), each person should have several adjectives and descriptive words listed on their backs. Go around the room and introduce each other, reading the words written on your neighbor's paper. This should be pretty humorous, and if people did this activity correctly, there should be lots of kind things said about each other. Important note: instruct everyone to write nice (or encouraging) words ONLY! Do not allow any mean, rude, or critical words to be written. For example, one can write words such as "beautiful smile," "great sense of humor," "smart and witty personality," "gifted listener," etc.

Ice Breaker 2 - Autograph Bingo

Autograph Bingo is a fun way to help both new acquaintances and old friends discover facts about each other. The goal of this icebreaker game is to mingle and obtain the signatures of people who have the facts listed on their bingo card. Just as regular bingo rules, once a player successfully obtains a full row (5 in a row) on his or her Bingo sheet, whether obtained horizontally, vertically, or diagonally, he or she shouts "BINGO!"

Setup

Prepare a table with 5 rows and 5 columns (5×5), with interesting facts inside the boxes.

These facts can include humorous or bizarre things. For example you can use facts such as:

- Speaks two languages or more
- Enjoys walking in thunderstorms
- Likes brussel sprouts
- Has been to Leitrim
- Has gone rockclimbing before
- Has more than three brothers & sisters
- Has gone without a shower for more than three days



Try to be as creative as you can. Like traditional bingo, you can mark the center square as a "Free Space". After you are finished preparing the table, print out enough copies. You are ready to play!

Instructions for How to Play

Pass out pens and the bingo cards to each player. Explain the game along with the following rule: each person you talk to may only sign your sheet once (so that people can interact with as many people as possible). When everyone is ready, say "Go!" and begin the game! Once a player shouts "Bingo!" everyone returns to the center and the person must introduce the people who signed his or her sheet. If desired, you can ask each person to explain their fact. The Autograph Game is a great way to learn humorous or unique facts about people. Have fun!

A2 - Evaluation Games

Evaluation Game 1 - The Goldfish Bowl

Make a rope circle on the ground. Divide the group in two. One half sits inside the circle and may talk. One half sits outside the circle and may only observe and listen. People in the inner circle evaluate the forum. After a few minutes the half groups change places and the new inner group continue with the evaluation or comment on the evaluation process they have just been observing.

Variation: Anyone in the inner circle can leave at any time, but the discussion does not continue until they have been replaced by someone from the outer circle.

Variation: Everyone starts in the inner circle and sits out when they have nothing they want to say. Anyone can move back into the inner circle at any time they want to speak. The evaluation finishes when no-one is sitting inside the circle.

Evaluation Game 2 – Knots

Tie a knot in a rope to make a rope circle. Everyone present at the forum holds on to the rope while standing or sitting in a circle. The circle should be a suitable size for group discussion. There is just one knot in the rope. The person with the knot in front of them may either make a comment or ask a question. When that person has finished speaking they start moving the rope in a clockwise direction. The knot keeps moving round until someone with the knot in front of them wants to say something, answer a question or ask another. That person calls 'stop' and holds the rope either side of the knot.

A3 - Possible Discussion Topics

The following are very brief ideas which may be considered for your County Venture Forum.

County Event Programme

Has there been too many/too few events?

Were there any problems with the events that need to be raised?

Did all groups participate effectively? If not, why not?

Do any issues need to be carried forward to the County Management Committee?



County Programme Support

Was support available when it was needed?

Is more/different support needed?

National Scout Issues

Are there any rule changes to propose to National Council?

Is sufficient support being provided from Scouting Ireland?

Are there any issues surrounding National Events to be discussed?

Youth Participation

Are there any barriers to your full participation in decision making that you would like to discuss?

Non-Scout Topics

Is there anything your group would like to discuss with other groups in this setting?

A4 - Some Opening Thoughts

Being the Change

Mahatma Gandhi said that "you must be the change you want to see in the world." How often do hear people talking about changing our world and yet they do very little to start that process of change? We, as Gandhi said, are the agents of change. Let us bear in mind as we go through our County Venture Forum that if we want a change to happen, we must be willing to accept the burden of responsibility and be that change.

Learn a Little About Those Who You Meet

Who said "I don't know half of you half as well as I should like to; and I like less than half of you half as well as you deserve?" Well? It was JRR Tolkien. Make sure you use this opportunity to meet other Venture Scouts, get to know everybody as well as you'd like to and like them as much as they deserve!

