

Guidelines for Unit Websites

Minsi Trails Council

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**Prepared by
Technology Committee**

**Approved:
(by Executive Board)
(Date)**

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Introduction

The Internet provides the opportunity for accurate and consistent information availability to its users regardless of geographic location. Organizations and corporations have taken advantage of this and have created websites that inform the public and their users about themselves, their product/service or mission. The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) is one of those organizations. Local scouting units have also recognized the advantages of a single site for members of the unit and the interested public to access information about its activities and accomplishments. Many of these sites are very creative and succeed in their mission.

The National Council of the BSA website is www.scouting.org. As part of their responsibility to provide accurate and consistent information to the public and its members, they publish standards and guidelines for councils to follow on their sites. Councils are required to conform to these if they are to be recognized as official BSA sites. Within these are guidelines for district sites and suggestions concerning unit sites. The guidelines in this document are based on that document and BSA policies concerning youth protection and obligations to its members and chartering organizations. It is also approved by Minsi Trails Council.

Purpose

Minsi Trails Council's (MTC) website has been reviewed by National. As part of the process for effective use of the site, there is a need to establish policies concerning publication of content and links to the site. MTC has established an Internet Committee to assist in the development of the website, its content and policies of use. The baseline document will be the National Standards and Guidelines, which is used and paraphrased extensively in this document, with local Council policy being additive to meet our particular needs.

This document will focus on Unit websites.

Many of the units in the Council have established websites and have requested a link from the Council/District site. This can be done, but the units need to meet basic standards for that link to be implemented. MTC is required to insure that any site linked from Council site meet the standards established by National and any local standards. These are not impossible standards and are not restrictive, but are just good practices to protect the unit, the chartering organization and the BSA. They do not restrict the creative aspect of the website but rather address the issues of content, legal concerns and youth protection. Regardless of whether the unit wants to link to the Council website or not, the following guidelines can be used by any unit. This document presents the Council Guidelines.

Guidelines

MTC is the primary means of delivering the Scouting program in our area and is the main point of contact between the BSA and the volunteers. It is required, by our charter, to observe the rules and regulations of the Boy Scouts of America. The local unit is the BSA's first point of contact between the parents and the youths involved in the program. By its charter, the Chartering Organization agrees with the BSA on the above and the BSA agrees to support the organization in delivering the program. This document addresses some of the issues of communication, legal protection, privacy and youth protection. It is not meant to be all inclusive; rather it's a guide to some of the more important considerations of having a website.

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In order to be linked from the Council website the following guidelines must be met:

- The website has been approved by the Chartering Organization and the unit committee.
- The unit webmaster is a registered and trained adult leader.
- The unit must have direct control over the content of its site through its webmaster. The site cannot provide “real time” chat, bulletin boards or guest books/logs, and, any information left by visitors must be reviewed by the adult webmaster prior to appearing on the website.
- The content of the site must be appropriate to Scouting.
- The site cannot contain links to any sites that contain material that is not appropriate to the Scouting movement and chartering organization ideals. If links are provided, the site must contain the appropriate disclaimer concerning linked content at the linking location.
- The site cannot contain any advertisements or commercial endorsements.
- The unit site should not engage in the electronic commerce (eg. a web store).
- The site cannot replicate any BSA publication currently for sale through the BSA Supply Division.
- Unit sites must abide by all laws regarding copyrights, trademarks, and other intellectual property, and also by those pertaining to the Internet.
- Unit sites must consider the safety and privacy of their members and participants by obtaining the necessary permissions to release information about or images of any individual.
- A copyright notice must appear on each page, and, disclaimers and privacy policies are used, if required.
- The unit site must be maintained and kept current.
- The unit webmaster, acting with the approval of the unit, must agree to the above and maintain the standards on the site.

When the unit has indicated that the guidelines are met and the unit site has been reviewed, a link will be provided from the Council site. The above may seem to be formidable, but it must be remembered that the site is the window into the unit, the chartering organization and the BSA.

The following information is provided to assist in meeting the above.

Quick Reference Guidelines

Content

- Personal and or sensitive information relating to the youth members must not be part of the site content. These may include but are not limited to Names, Addresses, Phone Numbers & Email Addresses.
- Photos must not be captioned with any personal information or names. Units may create aliases such as the use of initials to identify members.
- Photos and graphics can only be used with the creators/authors permission. Federal copyright laws apply.
- Commercial sites may not be linked directly to a unit site. Units may link to other non-profit organizations such as their chartering organization.
- Advertisements may not appear on unit sites. Units may not sell space on their site as a way to offset the cost of the site.
- BSA Youth Protection Guidelines should be considered when creating a unit site.
- Units posting sensitive information behind a password protected or secure page must be aware of the ability of others to penetrate security measures. Avoid posting sensitive/personal information at all cost.

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Approvals

- Youth members of units should not be granted access or given passwords to the site.
- Youth members should never be able to edit content and post updates without prior adult approval.
- Talent Release forms must be obtained from a member's legal guardian before photos/information relating to that member is posted on the site.

Content

- Appearance of sites should be neat and clean.
- Unit Sites should reflect the general mission of the BSA.
- Material must always be scout appropriate and relevant to the unit's purpose.
- Content should updated regularly and kept current

These quick reference points are not intended to take the place of the following formal document. Please consult the document below before creating a unit site. Units must abide by the rules set forth here to be linked from www.minsitrails.com For further information units should consult their District Executive or District Webmaster.

General Guidelines for Unit Websites

Approvals

Through the charter, a sponsoring organization and the BSA enter into an agreement concerning the Scouting program. The sponsoring organization recognizes the synergies between their goals and ideals and the BSA. This relationship is a topic in the training program that leaders attend. Also covered are the responsibilities of the Unit Committee as the executive organization of the Unit.

A website, which becomes a public information source on the internet, must receive the Chartering Organization's approval and that of the unit committee. The website, even if the primary intent is only for members of the unit, must be in compliance with the Charter agreement. A Unit website is not an official BSA website.

Site Hosting

Site hosting is one of the more difficult decisions of the unit's website project.

Though it is quite acceptable, under most circumstances, for units to host their sites in donated Web space (possibly from their chartering organization or a member providing the web space from their ISP), it is advisable to have a written agreement that guarantees the unit control over the content of its site. Such agreements are essential to maintaining reliable control over the unit's Web presence and in understanding each party's responsibilities.

An alternative is to use the web space provided by the ISP, if the unit has purchased its own web access.

Certain sites offer services such as statistics, hit counters, guest books, animations, and the like to other Web sites. The primary purpose of these giveaways is to advertise and plant links to the "donor" site on a

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wide range of Web sites in order to draw audience away from its "benefactors." These services should be avoided entirely.

Another popular type of banner on the Internet provides site owners with free promotion on other Web sites in exchange for promoting other sites on theirs. Though not strictly a commercial endorsement, these banners remain unacceptable because they provide a highly visible link from the unit site to others, and the unit does not control either the graphic that is displayed or the site to which it links - one or both may be inappropriate.

There are a number of Web sites that offer "awards" or "certification" for other sites. These awards/certifications often require the honoree to display a URL or provide a click-through link that promotes the grantor's site. In many cases, such "honors" are ploys to draw traffic to other sections of the grantor's site, with a commercial or political motive. These should be avoided.

Site Content

It is important to know the original source of all unit Web site content and to be sure the unit has permission to use it. The only content the unit owns outright is the text, photos, illustrations, design, and programming developed by the members of the unit specifically for use by the unit. Permission must be given by the owner for using all other material.

- **Third-Party Material**

If a unit wishes to include any content (whether text, photographs, illustrations, design, or programming), that is not developed by unit members, it is important to obtain written permission from the owner of that material. Even if the material is owned by a volunteer or donor and is provided with the understanding it will be used in the unit's site, written permission remains important.

In its simplest form, this written permission can be provided in a letter that explicitly states that the owner will permit the unit (or the Boy Scouts of America) to use the material. It is also common to indicate the duration (dates) for which the permission is granted, the medium (media) in which the reproduction may occur, and any restrictions that may apply.

- **Materials from Other Web Sites**

Reusing material found on the Internet is especially dangerous. It is all too common for amateur Web publishers to take copyrighted material and reproduce it on their own Web sites and say that it is "free" or "public domain." A written agreement is prudent, regardless of any explicit disclaimer on a Web site, before using any material downloaded from the Web. It is especially important to obtain permission in advance for materials used on the Internet. Unlike newsletters, which are distributed only to members, the Internet is available to the public, and it is inevitable that the owner will discover your use of their material on your Web site. Many sites provide "free" templates, graphics, animations, etc. for personal use – the unit web site is not personal use. Even if the "offer" extends to non-profit organizations, most, if not all, require a link back to their site. These "offers" should be avoided, and in many instances, that link is a requirement of their fair use and/or copyright and eliminating the link places the unit in violation.

- **Third-Party "Scouting" Sites**

There are numerous Scouting-oriented sites on the Internet that are not maintained or authorized by the BSA. These sites provide a wealth of general-interest information on topics of interest to members and program participants (camping, games, songs and skits, crafts, etc.). Some of these sites also provide information such as program helps, advice for leaders, requirements, procedures,

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forms, publications, ceremonies, and other resources that would seem to be of an official nature, but which are not authorized by the BSA. In some cases, this information is misleading or incorrect, and could cause conflict with members who refer to unofficial sources the unit "endorsed." Worse, these sites may suggest activities that are unacceptable or unsafe by BSA standards, causing potential liabilities for a unit and chartering organization that "authorized" (by linking to) the site for use by its members. Disclaimers indicating the sites are informational and not official BSA sites should be used.

- **Third-Party Commercial Sites**

While many commercial sites provide valuable information of a non-commercial nature, units should be careful when linking to these sites to avoid the impression that the unit is endorsing commercial products or services. Annotation often makes the difference, as in this example: A link to xyzboots.com (the XYZ Boot Company's home page) appears to be a commercial endorsement. If you added the sentence "The XYZ Boot Company provides excellent advice for avoiding hiking injuries," and then linked directly to the page about avoiding hiking injuries, you clarify that the unit is referring to the information the company is providing rather than the product it is selling.

- **Links to Other Web Sites**

In general, units should be cautious about linking to other Web sites. A user may follow a link from the unit's site to another, which links to another and another ... and the chain of links may lead to a site that contains unacceptable content.

Though experienced users recognize the ownership of Web pages, inexperienced ones may feel the unit is culpable for content they are exposed to after clicking links that lead them several sites removed from the unit's site.

The safest course of action would be not to link at all. At the very least, units should review any site to which they link to ensure its content is appropriate to the Scouting movement, and should be prepared to delete links in a timely manner in the event the content of these sites changes.

Another significant implication about links is that a link to a third-party site implies an endorsement. It will be assumed that the unit endorses the content for use by its audience, which is primarily composed of its membership, adults and youth. For this reason, units should be especially cautious in providing links.

- **Photographs**

For photographs taken by unit personnel or by photographers hired by the unit, a "talent release" should be obtained for every person shown in the photos. Attached to this document is a talent release form similar to that used by the National Council. This particular release obtains permission for the Boy Scouts of America (the National Council, any local council, district, or unit) to use the image in any medium. You may use it as is by typing it onto your unit or other letterhead, or customize it to obtain rights for your unit only or for only certain media if you wish. It is especially important to obtain this release, with the signature of a guardian, for youth.

While obtaining the permission of the owner (photographer) of an image or obtaining talent releases for photographs taken by the unit is adequate to satisfy ownership issues, it is also prudent to obtain the permission of the subject(s) specifically to use their likeness on the Internet. See "Photographs and Names" under "Privacy and Youth Protection" for more detailed information.

Electronic Commerce

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Units are prohibited from engaging in the sale of BSA Supply Division merchandise or competing products via the Internet. Any form of electronic commerce is highly discouraged from a unit's web site.

Privacy and Youth Protection

The Internet is perceived as a threat by some individuals, and they are vehemently opposed to having their images or personal information available to others. This perception is not unjustifiable, as demonstrated by periodic media coverage of predators who exploit the Internet to select, locate, and contact their victims.

- **Collecting Personal Information**

Privacy is a delicate issue on the Internet, and many people are reluctant to use sites or interfaces that require them to provide personal information such as their name, address, telephone number, e-mail address, etc. We recommend that units avoid using the Internet to gather this information. The unit can provide an email contact to a user to request information or leave comments or suggestions.

Units may create email aliases that forward messages directly to members without displaying the user's actual email address, if the web host allows. For more information on this please contact your District Webmaster.

It is especially important to treat contact information carefully: contact information should be used only for the purpose for which it was provided. It is unethical and in some cases illegal to use this data for any solicitation or communication outside the context in which it was provided. The issue is particularly serious regarding contact information for children under 13.

- **FTC Guidelines**

If there is a need to collect information from visitors, the site must have a posted Privacy Policy. The Federal Trade Commission recommends that charities and companies that collect personal information from online visitors use the following set of four standards—known as "fair information practices"—in creating privacy policies to post on their Web sites:

- Notification. Visitors to the Web site should be notified as to what personal information is being gathered, how that information is used by the organization, and with what third parties, if any, the organization will share it.
- Choice. Visitors should be provided with a means by which to contact the organization or take other actions to ensure that their personal information is not shared, if they so choose.
- Security. Users of the site should be notified of the means by which the organization protects personal information, including protection from any misuse, alteration, or access by unauthorized users. Organizations should strive to ensure that the same level of privacy protection is extended by any third parties with whom they share individuals' personal information.
- Access. Web site users should have reasonable access to any personal information about themselves that the organization holds, as well as a means of correcting or amending the information if it is inaccurate

- **Children's Online Privacy Protection Act**

Contact information for youth participants should never be provided on the Internet. If the unit wishes to maintain contact information for youth participants, it is strongly recommended that these lists are kept entirely off-line.

Concerning e-mail addresses in particular, units should be aware that there are computer programs that crawl the Internet compiling lists of e-mail addresses that appear on Web pages. These lists

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are often sold to e-mail marketers who regularly send unsolicited advertisements, primarily for pornography and pyramid schemes. It is recommended that units that wish to provide e-mail contact information utilize techniques to prevent or minimize this unfortunate side effect (such as "escaping" characters or using CGI scripts that maintain the actual addresses in a safe location).

While the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) applies to commercial Web sites, it provides sound guidance for any Web site that is intended for use by children under 13. Therefore, if your Web site collects any personally identifiable information from or about children, you should review and consider complying with this legislation. The full text of COPPA can be found online at:

<http://www.ftc.gov/ogc/coppa1.htm>.

Information on how to comply with the act is available at the FTC's "Kidz Privacy" Web site at:

<http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/buspubs/coppa.htm>

- **Providing Personal Information**

Contact information should only be published for a reason—specifically, whether there is a valid need for the members and/or the public to contact a given individual because of that person's role in the unit.

Contact information for adult volunteers should be treated with caution, as it is likely this information will be personal in nature (home addresses, residential telephone numbers, and private e-mail accounts). If this information is made available on the Web site, it would be preferable to provide it in a password-protected area of the Web site to which the general public has no access. Exceptions may be made for those volunteers whom it would be necessary for third parties to contact in order to obtain information about the unit or to provide information to the unit.

It is strongly recommended that this information be published only after obtaining written authorization, and that these individuals should know that they can (and how to) request the prompt removal of their information at any time.

- **Photographs and Names**

A unit should obtain permission before publishing any photographs of individuals either alone or in a group on the Internet.

Because of privacy laws that could be implicated if a child's photograph is published on the Internet without his parents' permission, ownership of the image alone does not carry with it the right to publish it. Therefore, the unit should obtain permission from any person who is the subject of a photograph before displaying their image or likeness on the Internet.

When using photographs of members, especially youth, it is also important to consider their safety and privacy when choosing captions or ancillary text. Some units have established policies that no names will be associated with photographs at all, whereas others have a "first name only" policy for youth under a certain age, but allow the full names of adult leaders and older Scouts to be published.

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Non-Exclusivity

Though the Internet is a popular medium, and though its popularity continues to increase at an astounding rate, it's important to remember that it is not yet a universal medium. While the unit's Web presence may support traditional channels of distributing information, it should not replace them, and should be treated as a secondary (rather than preferred or exclusive) channel of communication with members and volunteers.

Conclusion

This document is a working document and, as such, is not static. As the need arises or as National Policy changes, it will be reflected in these Guidelines. Suggestions or comments concerning these guidelines should be directed to the Technology Committee for consideration.

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Attachment - Talent Release

I hereby assign and grant to the Boy Scouts of America the right and permission to use and publish the photographs/film/video tapes/electronic representations and/or sound recordings made of me this date by the Boy Scouts of America, and I hereby release the Boy Scouts of America from any and all liability from such use and publication.

I hereby authorize the reproduction, sale, copyright, exhibit, broadcast, electronic storage and/or distribution of said photographs/film/video tapes/electronic representations and/or sound recordings without limitation at the discretion of the Boy Scouts of America and I specifically waive any right to any compensation I may have for any of the foregoing.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State ZIP: _____

Phone number: _____

Photo session date: ____/____/____

BSA Council/Unit Number: Minsi Trails Council / _____

Signed: _____

Guardian: _____

Witness: _____

(if subject is younger than 18)

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