



MEMBERSHIP PLAN FOR VENTURING IN AREA 4, CENTRAL REGION, BSA

Approved by Area 4 VOA March 9, 2014

Version 2.4¹

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THE PROBLEM FOR WHICH WE HAVE A SOLUTION

Area 4 membership is at 3000 youth in 2013, down from 3,524 in 2012, and down from 3,706 the year before that. From a high of 7,237 in 2002, this year of 2013 shows the lowest number of Venturers in the 15 years of the Venturing program. A look at a graph of membership declines suggests a dying program. We know how vibrant Venturing can be and with the changes to the program to be announced in May 2014, this is the time to grow. A plan is required and our Area President has said we must look at membership in Area 4.

¹ Thanks to the following reviewers outside C4VOA of this document: David Weyrick, Area 4 Membership VP, and Kenneth King, CR AA-administration. Final responsibility nevertheless rests with the C4VOA.

Imagine a long talk about membership in Venturing and membership in the BSA in general with someone in the know. The current panic is losing Tigers (-11.0% central, -13.3% national in the last year 2012-2013) and cubs in general. The membership crisis is enough that Venturing is never brought up, not mentioned, and essentially not an issue. If they don't fix cubs then there will be no program is their view, and in part that is quite correct. This energizes councils and their professionals quite rightly and causes them to focus on the entry level problems.

In the last year (2012-2013) membership in Venturing fell (-17.0% central, and -12.5% nationally) similar to the Tiger loss. The number of tigers served is about the same as the number of Venturers, however, Tigers will or can remain in the program for years, becoming Boy Scouts, while the life of a Venturer is maybe 2-3 years on average (need evidence) and the crew itself also about 3 years (need evidence). Since 2008, membership in venturing has declined dramatically. This certainly is a problem of recruiting, but perhaps an even bigger problem of retention. If the professionals are primarily focused on entry level scouting, it is up to the volunteers in Venturing to find a solution.

THE SOLUTION – MORE AND BETTER QUALITY VOAS

In all of the Venturing changes announced for 2014, there are no direct plans for membership growth beyond the peer-to-peer recruiting kits. Of course, an improved program might hold on to more since good program always leads to good attendance and retention. Whether having a

*Councils in the Central Region with a Venturing Officer Association lost
9% of their Venturers from 2012-2013*

Councils without a VOA lost 27%, THREE TIMES that amount.

Council VOA means better program or just more attention from the council on Venturing, it is now clear that membership declines in councils with VOAs is one-third of the declines in councils without Council VOAs. The number one thing that we can do to support membership growth is to continue to enhance and to grow the number of councils with Council VOAs (see Table 1).

TABLE 1 MEMBERSHIP GROWTH RATES IN CENTRAL REGION VENTURING - THE EFFECT OF VOAS

Venturing Membership and Growth Rates in Councils with and without Venturing Officer Associations, Central Region BSA, 2012-2013

	No. Councils	Venturers on 12/31/2013	Growth Rate 2012-2013
All CR Councils	72	35780	-17.0%
with VOA	29	21549	-9.2%
without VOA	43	14231	-26.5%
Positive Growth Councils	22	11503	8.4%
with VOA	9	8321	8.2%
without VOA	13	3182	9.1%
Negative Growth Councils	48	23672	-25.8%
with VOA	19	13104	-17.7%
without VOA	29	10568	-33.8%
Zero Growth Councils	2	605	
with VOA	1	124	
without VOA	1	481	

VOA Status as shown on Area Pages of CRVenturing.org on 2/5/2014

Support for newly developing VOAs is essential, but we must not overlook the existing VOAs that may not yet be operating up at peak performance.

Growing and sustaining council VOAs is key. Once VOAs, and their associated programming, become more common, there will be greater opportunities to reach out to non-Venturers to connect them with the program.

WHY NOW?

Venturing is changing in 2014. After years of negative growth (see Figure 1 and Figure 2), we have a real opportunity with the launch of the new program materials to make a fresh push for Venturing over the summer and into the fall of 2014. This opportunity should not be squandered and we should make plans to roll out the new program materials and to make a simultaneous push for better organization and more members.²

² Updates to the Venturing Program will be released officially through the scouting websites <http://www.scouting.org/scoutsource/programupdates.aspx> and <http://www.scouting.org/scoutsource/Venturing/NewProgAnnouncement.aspx>.

FIGURE 1 VENTURING MEMBERSHIP CENTRAL REGION AREA 4, 1999-2013

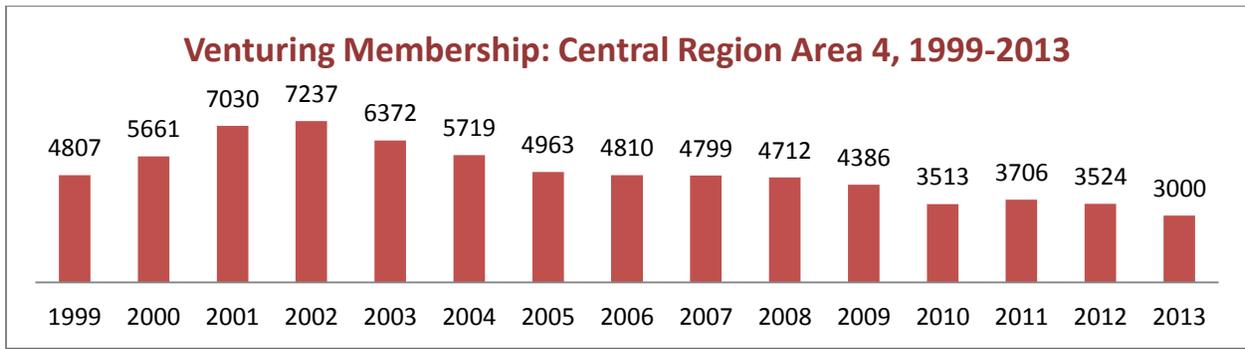
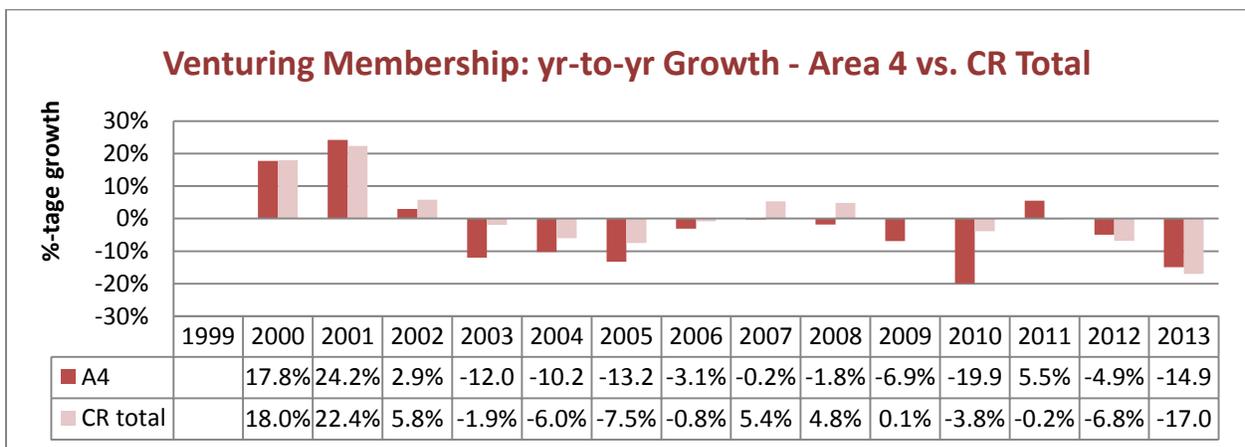


FIGURE 2 VENTURING MEMBERSHIP YEAR-TO-YEAR GROWTH AREA 4 AND CR TOTAL



IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The C4VOA will implement this project in 2014 by circulating this white paper to councils. In addition the C4VOA will begin a process of creating trainings that can be used by councils to implement VOAs, strengthen VOAs and to train other persons as necessary.

CONSIDERATIONS AS THE 2014 VENTURING CHANGES OCCUR

In the 2014 changes, the Road Map to Venturing describes a new position of Council Venturing Chairman being added to the Council VOA Advisor leading to a key 4 concept. Helping define these positions with the goal of better Council VOAs and greater chance of membership growth is essential. Some considerations

- Council Venturing Chairman, with board status, to guide and support Venturing
 - Use Council Standards of Venturing Excellence standard to provide benchmarks of program progress
 - Provide a significant “kick-off” event for revised Venturing program to be launched in May 2014

- To support council level Venturing much like a unit committee chairman provides support for their unit.
- Appoint a Council Venturing Membership Chair to coordinate with Council Membership Committee and District and Unit Membership Chairs.³
- Encourage the Council Commissioner to appoint an Assistant Council Commissioner-Venturing and make them a part of the Council Venturing Committee.
- Council VOA advisor selected with the same care and consideration as applied for selecting an Order of the Arrow Lodge Adviser
 - Recognition of VOA Advisor as part of the Council Venturing Key 4.
 - To provide advice for the council president and the officers of the VOA much like an Unit Advisor does for their own crew officers.
- Council Venturing President to be one of the two top serving youth in the council
 - To be held in as high esteem as the Order of the Arrow Chief
 - To be given the opportunity to represent older scouting in public forums.
 - To bring visibility to senior scouting and to give younger scouts a look upward to keep them engaged.
- Crew level Venturing Presidents and their Advisors implemented as part of the Council VOA.
 - Focused concentration on representing and supporting the membership at the unit levels.
- Training support for new VOA officers to help them focus on
 - Youth level (peer-to-peer) mentoring
 - Council-level programming for Venturing age youth
 - Encourage programming for Venturers at District events (e.g., activity strand during camporees appropriate for Venturers), independent of programming for Boy Scouts
- A heightened and important role for Venturing Commissioners including
 - An Assistant Council Commissioner as part of the Council Venturing Committee
 - Assistant District Commissioners for venturing to coordinate
 - Unit Commissioners trained in Venturing and assigned to all venturing units.
- Staff Professionals that are there for support for the Council Level volunteers, but not there to do it all as serving district executives might
 - An emphasis on Venturing at the council level much more like Order of the Arrow at the council level needing only a staff professional to represents and support.
 - Units in venturing still served by the district executive as with all units.

³ Membership Chairman Resources

http://www.scouting.org/scoutsource/Membership/Youth_Recruitment/Membership_Chairman.aspx

A direct plan for both recruiting and retention should be developed. This plan should address

- Venturing Chairman
- Commissioners
- Staff Professionals
- VOA Advisors and Council Venturing Presidents
- Crews
- Boy Scout troops

COUNCIL VENTURING CHAIRMAN

This is a new position added to the existing key 3 of the Staff Professional, the council VOA Advisor and the Council Venturing President. This position should relate to the VOA Advisor as a unit committee chair related to a unit advisor. The Council Venturing Chair will provide the support that the VOA needs and allow the VOA to be led by the officers and advisors, the principles of which are the Council Venturing President and the VOA Advisor (to the president). This requires a key 4 concept.

Board status for this person will shift the burden of supporting venturing from the staff professional to the volunteers and help treat Council Venturing as a program (think OA organization) but one with direct membership (recruiting and retention) responsibility.

Coordination of membership recruiting, retention and new unit formation will come under this position as will their coordination with the Council Membership Committees and Council Commissioner.⁴

COMMISSIONERS IN VENTURING

The lack of commissioner guidance towards venturing seems to be a major problem. When a council in our area was surprised that it lost 3 crews in one district, the problem was probably obvious to any unit commissioner that either they did not recruit or were headed by leaders ready to move on as soon as their child moved on, or perhaps the crews were not running a quality program. A Venturing-trained unit commissioner should be tasked to (1) encourage recruiting by their units, (2) assist with ideas for retention, (3) make sure they re-charter, (4) to evaluate the units to provide a quality control, and to (5) be trained in venturing so they can coach the advisors and committee members towards a stronger program. The use by unit commissioners of the Commissioner Worksheet for Crews, the Crew/Ship Self-Assessment worksheet and the JTE / Crew forms will help the unit become stronger, retain more members and more likely be able to recharter because each relates to the quality of the unit.

Quality at the council level is by the use and encouragement of the Council Standards of Venturing Excellence form and award. The form and its items offer a roadmap to excellence in program delivery and straight forward hints on how a quality VOA is structured. If the mere presence of a

⁴ The Council Venturing Chairman will work with the Council Membership Chairman as described in http://www.scouting.org/scoutsource/Membership/Youth_Recruitment/Membership_Chairman/council.asp
x

Council VOA is associated with more favorable membership levels, then how much more must a quality VOA in a quality council be associated with even greater membership levels.

Commissioner service charged directly with venturing can avert or mitigate issues of quality, recruiting, retention, re-chartering and training.

- The Area VOA can gather or create training materials for venturing commissioners and have it reviewed by Venturing-trained Commissioners. A home for and a first pass of this material is <https://sites.google.com/a/crventuring.org/c4voa/resources-for-venting-commissioners>
- The need for training is great. Outside of some basic courses in the College of Commissioner Science, there is little Venturing guidance for Commissioning a Venturing unit and almost none for role of commissioners at a council level.
- Venturing Commissioners offer needed coordination and support. An Assistant Council Commissioner of Venturing to report to the Council Commissioner and to assist District Commissioners to direct their Venturing Unit Commissioners to help recharter crews and life-save them. In fact an ADC for Venturing in each district would focus the issue if the district is large enough.
- The Assistant Council Commissioner should be invited to and be a part of the Council Venturing Committee.

STAFF PROFESSIONALS IN VENTURING

We need to be mindful of the Venturing Staff Professionals who receive very little direct training in Venturing and have a focus much more strongly if not exclusively on Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts.

- Membership needs to be the responsibility of the volunteers and not primarily the professionals.
- We need to keep Venturing on the minds of our staff professionals without becoming a bother to them.
- The C4VOA can adapt a training course (from Area 3) for the professionals, in a self-study way with a personal follow-up after they have been through the material. This home for this course is <https://sites.google.com/a/crventuring.org/c4voa/resources-for-professionals>
- Show the professionals that they have a stake in a strong VOA. We emphasize the ability of a council VOA to lessen membership declines and enhance membership gains over not having a VOA. (Ken Boyer study and the Central Region table shown above)
- The C4VOA must create as part of the above course or as a standalone how the JTE and CVSE both lead to strong membership
 - JTE #2 (2014) requires a crew membership growth plan. Can we find examples beyond just a recruitment night?
 - JTE #3 requires (45%, 60% and 80% retention). Can we find examples of how to help crews directly increase retention?
 - JTE #7 the Annual Super Activity can be the glue that holds the crew together. Naming the next Super Activity before the current one ends may also be helpful. Gold level of JTE #1 is 6 regular activities in a year.
 - JTE #6 Get leaders and youth trained with VSLT (adults) and ILSC (youth).

COUNCIL VOA ADVISOR AND COUNCIL VENTURING PRESIDENT

Council VOAs will be a reasonable place to put much of the recruiting and retention materials and we will reach crews through them. Good program always builds good units. Council VOAs must have at least one council wide event concentrating on recruiting such as a “bring a freshman” event. Perhaps we should encourage near-by councils to go together to share the cost and to use a larger venue. Many good ideas are in the professional trek course linked above.

- Communicating all of this: C4VOA should put together the tools in one place to support recruiting and retention. A one-stop shop of ideas.
- The page for this information may be the current Council Resources page at <https://sites.google.com/a/crventuring.org/c4voa/resources-for-councils>.
- Council VOAs need to be sensitive to the needs of the council and offer to assist FOS support and service to camp.
- In service to camp the Council VOA could liaison with the Order of the Arrow to create joint service opportunities.
- Encourage each council to get all of their crew members (youth and adults) on Facebook for purposes of joining their Council Venturing Facebook group and to join the Area 4 Facebook page.
- Keep crews aware of Venturing Happenings by submitting events to the Central Region calendar and publicizing that to the crews
- Council VOAs must represent on the C4VOA and participate in strengthen the area as they in effect strengthen themselves.

REACHING THE CREWS

Encourage each council (with and without Council VOAs) to hold one fun council wide event each year and to use it as a recruiting event.

Crews need to be encouraged not to neglect that one Super Activity each year that is often the glue that holds the crew members interest. Never finish one Super Activity without already knowing the next activity to peek their interest in staying with the crew.

Crews need to consider recruiting events for their friends not associated with scouting. Venturing may offer program opportunities more attractive to these youth than traditional scouting and is more age appropriate for non-scouting friends. Reaching out, indeed treating each crew event as a potential new member opportunity is a way to sustain the crew membership.

Crews can encourage the startup of a feeder program. One such program is a Frontier Girls Troop started up specifically to give younger girls a chance to learn outdoor skills before transitioning to the Venturing Crew sponsored by their same organization. So popular, this girls troop have named them self the “Pocket Crew.” (see “Young Girls, Future Venturers” at <http://scoutingtogether.blogspot.com/2013/04/young-girls-future-venturers.html>)

A concept of *Charter Organization Family of Scouting* can be pushed with great possibilities of success. In the case of the Frontier Girls above the chartering organization likes to refer to its involvement as the “First Baptist Family of Scouting.” It is proud of its scouting organizations under

its umbrella whether BSA (Pack, Troop, Crew) or not (Frontier Girls and at one time Girl Scouts). By coordinating the message to have a program for all youth, transition between the units is enhanced.

Crews should be encouraged to make use of the new position of Venturing Unit Membership Chairman.⁵

Crews can also actively seek participation with existing Boy Scout Troops to share in the experiences and to network with the older youth. Each set of older youth strengthens the other.

REACHING THE BOY SCOUT TROOPS

We need to reach the scoutmasters and boy scouts to show them that they can continue in their troop and participate in crew events as an older youth. Emphasize to scoutmasters that this assists their retention of older scouts and does not steal leadership away from the troop. Encourage joint activities between Boy Scouts and Venturing crews especially in the same charter organization or same district.

Encourage troops / districts to invite Venturers to assist in the planning of district and council events and to jointly participate.

Help BS leaders reframe their understanding of Scouting

- Scouting is a single youth development program, extending from age 7 to age 20
- Age cohorts in Scouting provide age appropriate programming. Boy Scouting is ideally utilized for youth aged 11-~14/15
- Older youth in Boy Scout troops are well served in extending their activities to beyond the troop activities such as lodge activities with the Order of the Arrow and participation with older youth in a Venturing Crew.
- Maintaining engagement in Scouting is our overall goal. In the same way that we don't want 13 year old Webeleos, we likewise need to provide age appropriate programming for high school age students

CREATION OF A RECRUITING KIT FOR VENTURING

Our VP administration has outlined the contents of a recruiting kit. As an example, this kit will include items such as those listed.

Area 4 membership increase plan

Recruitment kit/plans

- Power points
- contact list/info
- Pamphlets/national

⁵ See Venturing Unit Membership Chairman at http://www.scouting.org/scoutsource/Membership/Youth_Recruitment/Membership_Chairman/venturing.aspx

- Picture albums
- Peer to peer kit

Recruitment ideas/kits

- Webinars or YouTube videos/channel Area 4
- Flyers, commercials, Facebook
- Post in other sites instead of just on our sites/pages
- Secure funding to advertise Venturing through social media. (example: Chicago's NESAs group started by using Facebook to gain access to young adult males with an interest in outdoor adventure. They now have one of the largest NESAs council level memberships in the country)
- invite friends to events (this is important, as we tend to go for the low-hanging fruit – current BSA members; Venturing is delivered differently enough that it has the potential to appeal to non-Scouts)
- tell friends about our great program
- try and keep older scouts interested
- promote our program
- create a service crew from local council VOA to place venturing in front of the public
- wear the uniform more often

OUR YOUTH IS OUR STRENGTH.

We need to be vocal about Venturing and its positive benefits to youth and in turn to the council. Our youth officers should be ambassadors for the program at every opportunity. The more we can get them to Council events, the better. Venturing is not spoken in most councils, and when it is, it is often compartmentalized. Venturing occupies little time with the Scout Executive, the Council Executive Board, the commissioner staff and other council level committees. When we can get our youth near these people, they could be very valuable mixing and mingling with the Council Adults and must at all times speak of venturing and represent the program well. Having them remember a positive experience of our officers and advisors will pay off for venturing when decisions have to be made. Whether those decisions are made with ignorance or deliberately, we want venturing to be well considered.

AREA OFFICERS KEEP EVERYONE LOOKING UPWARD

Our annual training for Council VOA officers, advisors and other interested people is held in conjunction with the Area 4 Training Conference representing all of scouting in Area 4. C4VOA must develop a strategy for networking at this event in particular. Our Area Venturing President should be accorded the opportunity to speak to the entire assembled group with a brief message and a challenge to those in attendance. A challenge will be chosen that will most strengthen Venturing in the minds of the scouters assembled.

C4VOA must design a strategy to attend all university of scouting events, all commissioner college events, and other selected targets in both informal and formal ways. In the former case we attend

and mix with the delegates and in the latter perhaps we can campaign to present a course, training or a talk. Getting our Venturing Youth in their “gold loops” in front of as many people as possible will enhance the visibility of Venturing and also send a signal to council members that the Area values their role in Venturing.

Implications of the latter point is that youth running for officers must be willing to travel to events from crew events to council and area events to represent the best of Venturing to all.

The C4VOA area fun event should be the largest recruiting event of the year. The possibility of creating two “section” type events that are low cost / high value in the north versus the south might have the effect of getting youth to congregate and see how much fun venturing can be. The C4VOA could offer support for these “section-type” events, but the lead should come from the councils working together. That challenges Council VOAs to work and plan a fun event. Again these become major recruiting events.

We adults must look for opportunities to get the youth involved. Perhaps this is ambitious, but we are losing the numbers game and losing the money game has already occurred or can't be far behind.

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