

Simple Steps for Successful Program Planning



Good planning and preparation can make any event run more smoothly and cost-effectively, reducing stress for leaders and increasing the fun for participants. This is true for regular unit meetings as well as special events such as camps or district gatherings. The planning process may seem overwhelming at first, but by practicing a few basic techniques, anyone can plan effectively.

1. Set aside time for an official “planning meeting”

- **Bring together all the members of your leadership team, including Junior Leaders.** If everyone participates in the planning, the actual event will run much more smoothly.
- **Choose a location where everyone has room to make their own notes, and there will be minimal interruptions.** Around a dining room table, or your Unit meeting place are two possible locations.
- **Limit the length of your planning meeting – set a time frame (no more than two hours) and stick to it!** People will be more willing to attend planning sessions if they know in advance how much time is required.
- **Make use of tools such as a monthly Program Planning Worksheet.** Start by filling in weeks with things you already know, such as a District Thinking Day event, or a cancelled meeting due to school holidays. Add seasonal activities such as a Christmas or Valentine’s Day parties, and you will be surprised how quickly your calendar fills up! Be sure to include notes on who is doing any necessary preparation for activities.
- **Set a goal for your meeting.** Try to cover several months of planning during your meeting. This reduces the number of meetings you need to have and leaves more time for having fun. A good goal is to try and plan half a year’s meetings at a time (i.e. September – Christmas break and January – June). Hold special planning meetings for large events such as camps that require detailed plans.

- **Review each week's Unit meeting plans the week before.** One drawback to planning a long time in advance is that it is easy for people to forget about things they need to do. Try to set aside 5 minutes each week (before or after your meeting) to review what is happening the next week, and what each person is responsible for.

2. Request input from the participants (girls)

- **Planning activities to suit your group's interests makes life easier.**
Everyone from Sparks on up have definite ideas about what they like and do not like to do. Offer them age appropriate ways of sharing their ideas, and you will be surprised what they can come up with.
- **Sparks** – Offer choices between various options. For example, “Would you like to visit the hospital? Or the fire station?”
A good activity for allowing Sparks to “vote” on various options is to post pictures illustrating the different activities around the room. Explain to the girls what the pictures represent. Then give each girl a number of stickers and ask them to place the stickers on the picture (or pictures) showing the things they would like to do.
- **Brownies** – Ask questions such as “What places in town would you like to visit?” Provide an easy way for their responses to be recorded, such as an adult writing on a large piece of paper.
One way to collect general suggestions about their interests is by making collages. Provide the girls with old magazines and catalogues. Have them work with their circle groups to cut out pictures showing activities they would like to do during the year and paste them onto poster board. Discuss the pictures as a group.
- **Guides** – Encourage the girls to make specific suggestions such as “We want to earn our aviation badge”. Ask them questions to expand on their plans “Where can you get the information for your badge?” “Where should we visit?” etc.
Use patrols as discussion groups for brainstorming sessions. Give each group a piece of flip chart paper and a marker. Give them a specific amount of time (about 10 minutes) to discuss the things they would like to do. At the end of the discussion time, ask them to record their top ideas on the paper. Post all of the pages together, and look at them as a group. Have an older girl or leader use a fresh sheet of paper to list any ideas that appear more than once on the patrols' lists. Briefly discuss each of the ideas – ask for clarification from the patrols if necessary. Give the girls an opportunity to vote for their preferences. Record the results of the voting, and use them as a basis in planning future events.
- **Pathfinders / Senior Branches** – These girls are capable of doing most of their own planning. As their guider, you may need to:
Remind them of practical considerations such as time and cost.
Keep their planning sessions on track, and off subjects such as boys.
Make sure important details are not forgotten.
Mediate disputes.

Provide ideas when theirs run out.

Create a few surprises such as small crafts or games for times when their plans fall through.

- 3. Use your resources wisely** – Part of the Guide law, and an important reminder to leaders. You don't need to re-invent the wheel. There are many people in your community who would be thrilled to share their knowledge with your Unit. Don't be afraid to ask for help. If the person you ask can't help you, they may know someone else who can. There are also a lot of great resource materials available from the Girl Guides of Canada such as Instant Meetings, Guiders manuals, and many other publications. If you don't have these materials yourself, ask your District Commissioner or Territorial Program Director for assistance.

Like anything else, Program Planning is an acquired skill. Practice may not make us perfect, but it will make us more confident. The most important things to remember are that you can always ask for help, and "If it isn't fun, it isn't Guiding!"

Happy Programming!