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Voice of the Scout:
A Commissioner's Role
And
A Resource for Council, District and Unit Key 3's

Doctoral Project
Middle Tennessee Council
August 2012 - December 2013

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Chapter

Voice of the Scout Basics

Voice of the Scout is method of collecting feedback from Scouting's "stakeholders" that can be used by national, council, district and unit leaders to gain a better understanding in how they are perceived by the families, youth, charter organizations and communities they are attempting to serve. This program and the Net Promoter Score concept are used my thousands of other companies to drive growth for their businesses.

Surveys are sent out twice a year - spring and fall and are circulated to the following categories of respondents: Cub Scouts, Boy Scout/Venturers and their parents, Youth-Facing Volunteers, District Council Volunteers and Charter Organizations. The surveys are sent via emails from the National office utilizing Scout Net and the Scouting.org account database. Each of the cycles are made up of a series of questions. The first is a "loyalty" question, intended to gage how likely a respondent would be to recommend the scouting brand to friends and family members. Each loyalty question is followed by a series of "driver" questions that are intended to more accurately define why a person responded as they did. Questions can differ from cycle to cycle.

Respondents rate their experiences on a scale of 0 - 10 for each question and are offered the option of providing comments. If they have given a particularly poor rating in any category they are offered the option to be contacted directly by the council they are registered in - this is called an Experience Recovery.

Cycles last for 6 - 8 weeks and are released, collected and tabulated by the national office. Numerical and written feedback is published to District and Council Key 3s and professional via the VOS Dashboard located on the Scouting.org website.

The Voice of the Scout dashboard reflects a "Net Promoter Score" for each category of respondent. This score is calculated using a formula that subtracts negative scores from positive (more about this in Understanding Numbers) and it also breaks down other pertinent information such as "Available to Survey" totals and response rate percentages.

The Dashboard, along with the verbatim comments, which are also visible there, are intended to be used to enlighten Key 3's in how their existing program is perceived by their stakeholders. There are key indicators to look at that can also assist Key 3's with identifying areas of concern and lead them to set educated goals for their unit, district or council and, in the end hopefully improve the perceptions of our stakeholders.

Defining the Doctoral Project

My original outline for the project is below. The project was approved in August of 2012 and my intent at that time was to "serve as the liaison for the Middle Tennessee Commissioner Staff" as the development of the Voice of the Scout program progressed from council through district level, and then ultimately down to the unit level. My role was to provide orientation and education regarding the VOS program for the District Commissioners. I also agreed to offer the commissioners a model that would assist them in building a VOS feedback structure within their Key 3.

Voice of the Scout - A Commissioner's Role and Resource

1) **Familiarizing District Commissioners with the program**
   a) Introduction - What is VOS?
   b) Schedule of online access through unit level
   c) Importance of recruiting and unit assignments
   d) Assessments and counseling practices
   e) Ethics and confidentiality

2) **What can be done now to ensure success?**
   a) Email saturation
   b) Participation and promotion
   c) Training sessions in reading the VOS Dashboard
   d) Communication within the District Key 3
   e) Communication within each district's Commissioner Staff

3) **Developing and presenting models and presentation materials**
   a) Model of the Experience Recovery process
   b) Model of the District Key 3 meeting with VOS feedback
   c) Model of a Unit Key 3 VOS feedback session with a Unit Commissioner

After the project was approved I was asked to serve as the Voice of the Scout "Champion" for our Council; a position suggested by national BSA best practice materials for VOS implementation. Taking on this role allowed me to push for information regarding email saturation, training of commissioner staff, changes in incorporating district support of the program, and marketing VOS through Council publications. All communication and requests for action went through Martez Moore, our Director of Field Services and, when communicating educational sessions with the Commissioner Cabinet, our Council Commissioner, Tim Acree.

Where to Begin

As indicated in my outline the first step was to familiarize District Commissioners with the program. We spent the majority of that first session simply going over Voice of the Scout Basics and how the surveys were distributed to the respondent groups.

There were additional follow up trainings with the commissioner cabinet that shared with them how to prepare for the district and unit level access that were to be released in phases in 2013. Unit level would be the final phase and was scheduled to occur in December 2013.

The following is a presentation and handout that was circulated and discussed to all the current 2012 District Commissioners:

Prepare for Voice of the Scout

1. **Strive to achieve a full staff**
   - This has always been a priority, but as you begin to see comments you will notice that there might be issues in units that are going unaddressed. Commissioners will not always be the ones to solve each problem - there is a broader district and council responsibility to some of the comments - but do yourself a favor and get the folks in place ....be proactive.
2. **Get your staff trained - CCS, review of coaching, counseling and orient your new recruits**
   - Look at the value of coaching and counseling through new eyes. Review and reread these sections of the manuals. Impress upon your new recruits, and remind your existing staff of the importance of making that connection.
3. **Establish a serious working and communicating relationship with your District Key 3**
   - You should openly discuss VOS results with the Key 3
   - Incorporate this feedback into your District Committee meetings - they will play roles in addressing issues as well
   - Use the feedback to define strengths and weaknesses. Set goals and plan for changes as a district
4. **Discuss confidentiality with your staff**
   - You are going to be privy to some comments that are blunt and to the point, some will even name names. It's important to look beyond who said what about whom. It's more important to identify the underlying issue and try to resolve it.
5. **Strive to keep commissioning as your singular and primary role**
   - As always being a District Commissioner is a full time role. VOS will serve as a catalyst to open up communication and begin problem solving. You will be at the center of this for your staff

6. **Communicate the program and then delegate responsibilities**
   - Roundtable Commissioners can be in charge of promoting the system and updating folks on when the cycles are about to begin
   - ADCs can assist with counseling and coaching
   - Let units know when their feedback has brought about a positive change
7. **Begin, or continue, assessing your staff and rotating roles as needed**
   - It will be important to know the strengths and weaknesses of your staff. Find a good fit for each job
8. **Build coaching and counseling sessions into your monthly staff meetings**
   - This will be an important part of your role. You will be asked to lead an "Experience Recovery" at some point, if you haven't already. In the future you will be directing feedback at the unit level - we're not there yet, but we will be by the end of 2013. Get ready for it now.
   - Use 2012 comments to role play solutions for recovery sessions with your staff.
9. **Work towards developing a yearly Commissioner Service Plan that incorporates VOS**
   - Unit Self Assessments and JTE tie in nicely with VOS - find a way to convey that to your units
10. **These are the safe list email addresses for the fall VOS**

    - Note there is one for each response group. Share these with folks who have issues with surveys going to junk mail or have restrictive email settings. Do not respond to these emails, simply add them to your safe list:

Leaders - *vos.**leaders**@scouting.org*

Boys Scout and Venturers - *vos.**scout**@scouting.org*

Boy Scout Parents - *vos.**bsparent**@scouting.org*

Chartered Organizations - *vos.**cor**@scouting.org*

Cub Scout Parents - *vos.**csparent**@scouting.org*

District and Council Volunteers - *vos.**district**@scouting.org*

This particular presentation was a good one for the District Commissioners. It was my attempt to show how intertwined Voice of the Scout was with all the things that commissioners should be doing as a service corps; achieving a full staff, learning how to counsel/coach, discussing confidentiality with their staff, assessing and rotating commissioners, utilizing Roundtable as a VOS marketing tool and of course addressing issues with survey accessibility by listing the "Safe List" from national.

This presentation also drove home the importance of establishing a serious working relationship with their Key 3 counterparts within the district and we openly discussed how commissioners should not just see themselves as problem solvers or "fire stompers", but as a link to the resources that the District Committee can provide to units.
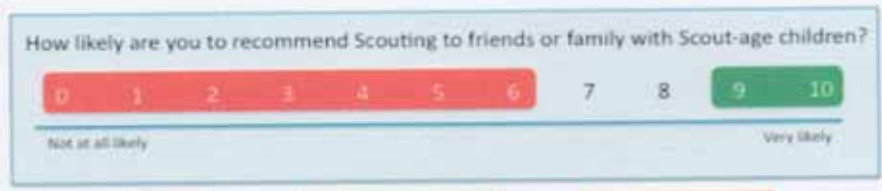
Understanding the Numbers

So let's talk numbers! All of the responses from each Voice of the Scout cycle is tabulated using the formula below. The basic premise behind the Net Promoter Score or "NPS" is that the BSA takes all of their "Promoters" – folks who are loyal to the program and who have a tendency to refer others, which aids us in increasing membership, and subtracts out the "Detractors" – folks who can impede membership growth by negative word-of-mouth and thereby damaging the Boy Scout brand.

"Passives" - folks who are satisfied, but unenthusiastic and vulnerable to leaving to dedicate their time to something else, are not part of the equation. It is generally felt that "passives" come and go freely and often times their commitment to the scouting movement is seen as dependent on other factors besides whether or not they are loyal to the scouting brand. While there may be value in their responses, their verbatim comments will show up in the Dashboard breakdowns, their numbers are not reflected in the NPS equation.

In the example below you can see a sample NPS calculation – out of the 100 people who responded, 30 viewed themselves as Promoters and 20 viewed themselves as Detractors. Based on how positively or negatively viewed a council may be, they could fall anywhere in the +100 % to -100% spectrum.

VOICE Net Promoter Score: Basic Components

VOICE OF THE SCOUT

How likely are you to recommend Scouting to friends or family with Scout-age children?

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Not at all likely   Very likely

NPS % = Sum % of Promoters - Sum % of Detractors

i.e. N=100   10% NPS   30% promoters   20% detractors
(response rate)   (30 people chose 9–10)   (20 people chose 0–6)

Promoters (score 9–10)   **Loyal enthusiasts** whose tendency would be to refer others and fuel growth.

Passives (score 7–8)   **Satisfied but unenthusiastic** customers vulnerable to leaving to dedicating their time to something else.

Detractors (score 0–6)   **Unhappy customers** who can impede growth through negative word-of-mouth, damaging the Boy Scout brand.
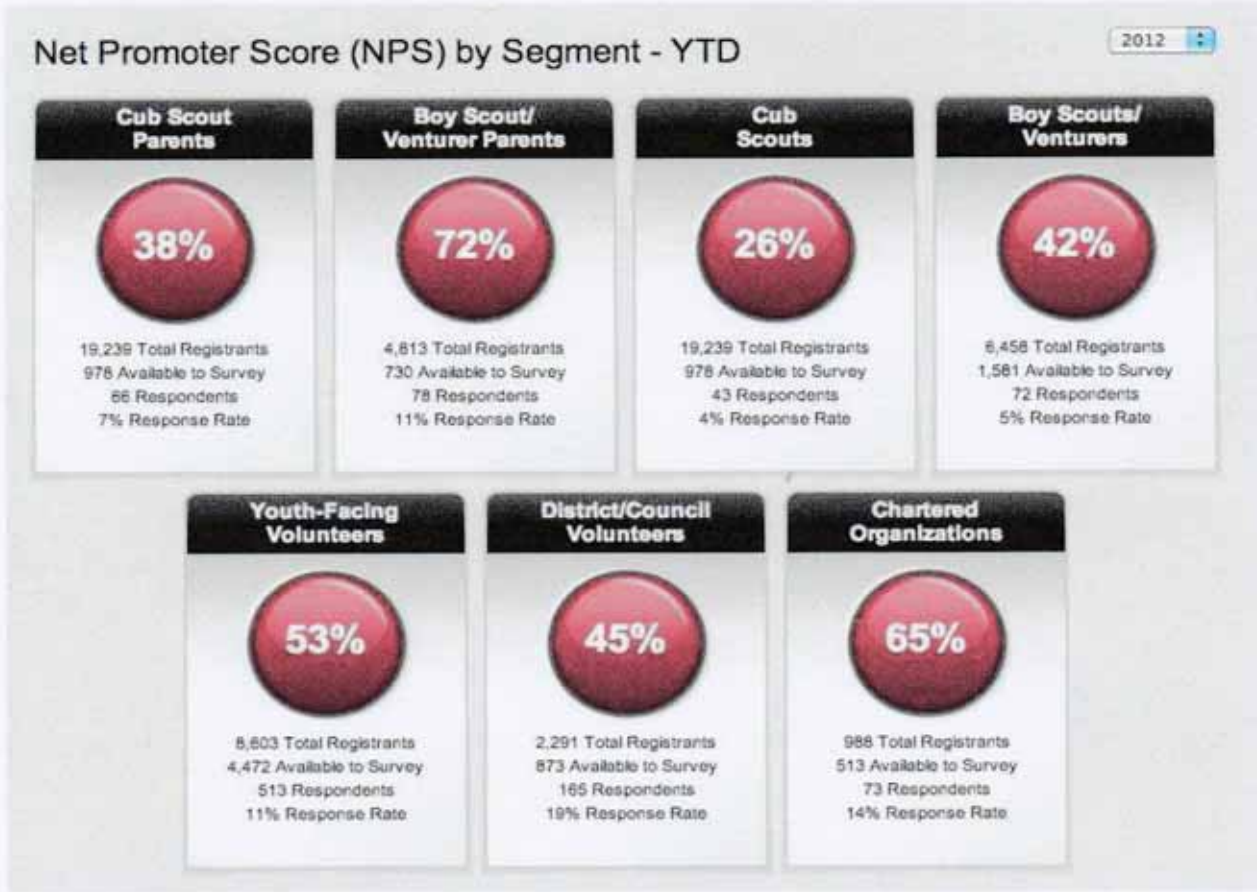
In order to more fully understand the validity of each Net Promoter Score it is important to consider the following when reviewing a cycle of responses:

- Look at the total number of individuals registered within that category
- Look at **Available to Survey**
- Is Email Saturation an issue in your council?

A low "Available to Survey" number in relation to "Total Registrants" means you have an email saturation rate issue. The sample below is a Spring 2012 Dashboard for Middle Tennessee. As you can see we had very poor "Available to Survey" numbers in all of the unit related dashboards at that time – Cub Parents, Boy Scout/Venturer Parents, Cub Scouts and Boy Scout Venturers. Our email saturation improves when we begin to look at Youth-Facing and District/Council Volunteers and Chartered Organizations. Email saturation increases in the volunteer respondent categories are most likely attributed to their knowledge, and frequent utilization, of the My Scouting account.

Some of the unit level categories issues with email saturation can be attributed to information not being written in on new membership applications or data entry issues at the council office by support staff, but it can also be attributed to newly registered leaders and committee members not utilizing the My Scouting account which links to the Scout Net system, where email information can be picked up and used for the VOS program. One additional consideration is that scouters utilizing their My Scouting account and updating their email addresses (as we suggested in VOS training) can still OPT OUT of any type of email notification from the national office – meaning a survey may never be able to reach them.

Net Promoter Score (NPS) by Segment - YTD

2012

Cub Scout Parents

38%

19,239 Total Registrants
978 Available to Survey
66 Respondents
7% Response Rate

Boy Scout/ Venturer Parents

72%

4,813 Total Registrants
730 Available to Survey
78 Respondents
11% Response Rate

Cub Scouts

26%

19,239 Total Registrants
978 Available to Survey
43 Respondents
4% Response Rate

Boy Scouts/ Venturers

42%

6,458 Total Registrants
1,581 Available to Survey
72 Respondents
5% Response Rate

Youth-Facing Volunteers

53%

8,603 Total Registrants
4,472 Available to Survey
513 Respondents
11% Response Rate

District/Council Volunteers

45%

2,291 Total Registrants
873 Available to Survey
165 Respondents
19% Response Rate

Chartered Organizations

65%

988 Total Registrants
513 Available to Survey
73 Respondents
14% Response Rate

As we look into the Dashboard a little further:

- Are you getting a good number of respondents from your *Available to Survey*?
- Could you be marketing VOS better in your council/district?
- Based on your response rate, is the feedback viable?
- Even low response rate should be considered viable IF over time the same issues come up

Our *Available to Survey* numbers have improved somewhat in the past year, but mostly within the Volunteer Respondent groups. In calculating the *Viable Email* percentages (reflected in the chart below in **GREEN** highlights) it is clear that we remain static with little or no growth over the past 18 months. It also appears that our Viable Email percentages increase somewhat for families involved in older scouting programs – Is it possible this is tied to parent involvement and subsequent use of the My Scouting account or simply a higher interest in the survey by families who have been in the program longer? Response rates continue to be low in all of the youth and unit based categories.

Cub Scouts						
VOS Cycle		Registrants	Available to Survey	% Email Viable	Total Responses	Response Rate
Spring 2012		17,334	1,914	11%	51	3%
Fall 2012		15,133	1,044	7%	20	2%
Spring 2013		17,661	1,318	7%	78	6%
Scout/Venturer						
VOS Cycle		Registrants	Available to Survey	% Email Viable	Total Responses	Response Rate
Spring 2012		5,015	752	15%	41	5%
Fall 2012		4,647	671	14%	18	3%
Spring 2013		5,618	824	15%	53	6%
Scout Parents						
VOS Cycle		Registrants	Available to Survey	% Email Viable	Total Responses	Response Rate
Spring 2012		3,208	261	8%	24	9%
Fall 2012		3,531	343	10%	15	4%
Spring 2013		3,502	391	11%	52	13%

NOTE: I intentionally left out Cub Scout Parent Category statistics in this spreadsheet since their Registrant, Available to Survey and % of Viable Emails are the same as the Cub Category. The Cub Scout Parent Category does have a slightly higher response total and response rate, but only by 1 or 2 percentage points.

Volunteer respondent categories continue to be our stronger response rates. Clearly the volunteer categories are folks who "walk the walk" of the scouting program every day and have a vested interest in the success of the program. Some of this increase could have been attributed to the upcoming Membership Standards vote or that *Youth Facing* and *District/Council Volunteers* simply wanted to be able to participate in the survey when invited. Basically, they have something to say and are utilizing the My Scouting account to update their contact information.

As we look a little closer, the **Response Rate** (highlighted in Red) for *Youth Facing Volunteers* tripled during the Spring 2013 cycle and almost doubled for *District and Council* level volunteers during that same period. It is also interesting to point out that the *Viable Email* percentage for *District/Council Volunteers* (highlighted in GREEN) has doubled in just 12 months; 39% during the Spring 2012 cycle and 79% during the Spring 2013 cycle. Could it be that the marketing we did via Scout Shorts, Jet Trails and Facebook caught the attention of volunteers? What would this detail look like if we could reach all families and more importantly what could we learn from them? If we limit ourselves to just the feedback of committed volunteers we do not get a full picture of how our program is perceived.

YF Volunteers					
VOS Cycle		Registrants	Available to Survey	% Email Viable	Total Responses	Response Rate
Spring 2012		6,604	3,791	57%	301	8%
Fall 2012		6,448	3,243	50%	210	6%
Spring 2013		6,634	4,318	65%	1223	28%
District/Council						
VOS Cycle		Registrants	Available to Survey	% Email Viable	Total Responses	Response Rate
Spring 2012		1,087	426	39%	78	18%
Fall 2012		1,295	935	72%	144	15%
Spring 2013		369*	291*	79%	90	31%

I struggle with how few viable email addresses we have for our Cub, Scout and Venturer categories. I wonder what else might be impacting these numbers. Is it possible that ScoutReach units impact a portion of registered youth and parents with no email information? If so, I don't think that would explain such small numbers in Available to Survey. We have discussed with commissioners the need to encourage parent email addresses on all applications, but perhaps a more comprehensive training or Round Up facilitators and Unit Leadership is in order. Could this be a role assigned to the District Membership Chairs?

Have we been rushing through the registration process and leaving out pertinent information that has come back to haunt us as VOS kicked off? To date our council does not wish to use the email saturation tool suggested by the tutorials for Voice of the Scout resources.

One other point worth noting is the significant drop in **District/ Council** registrants for the Spring 2013 cycle (noted as * on the spreadsheet). This may reflect efforts by our Commissioner staff to clean inactive commissioners off their rosters, but it is important to note that there is a 72% drop in registrants between Fall 2012 and Spring 2013. Available to Survey dropped as well, at about the same percentage (69%).

The only method our council has used to try and increase our **Available to Survey** numbers is for Commissioners to encourage registered members to establish a My Scouting account which they then update on a regular basis. This method has worked for our committed volunteers, but , again, this will not increase our numbers on the Cub Scout level where we struggle to increase our membership.

We are also encouraging everyone to OPT IN for all email notifications from National. Clearly this approach has us reaping the benefits when it comes to increasing the email saturation and response rates of our volunteers, but it does not bridge the gap with families we want and NEED to hear from.

Jet Trails, Scout Shorts, inserts in recharter packets and the Middle Tennessee Council Facebook page were all used to "market" VOS so that we might increase our response rate. Commissioners were instructed to use the web banners and promotional templates posted on the JTE Resources page on Scouting.org.

Reading Comments for Content

Numbers aren't the only way to look at feedback gathered from the VOS cycles. Upon "pushing the button" of any of the respondent categories you see a breakdown of how the responses stack up by question. This page shows where your council falls in relation to your particular region, and, national scores, which can be beneficial (**Appendix A**). While browsing this page it is beneficial to:

- Look at the questions that prompted low Promoter scores (**Appendix A, 1-2**)
- Look at the questions that prompted high Promoter scores (**Appendix A, 1-3**)
- Look at the questions that prompted high Detractor scores (**Appendix A, 1-4**)

- Pay attention when your NPS varies significantly from national or regional (*Appendix A, 1-1*)
- Look at the "One Thing" responses (*Appendix A, 1-5*)
- Look at the comments in all three categories (including Passives)
- Take notes, try to identify trends
- Communicate your review with your Key 3 or better yet, review it together
- Share the details with your commissioners and talk about how you interpret that feedback
- Use this feedback to set goals and identify areas for improvement
- Communicate changes you make based on feedback
- Celebrate progress!

Low Promoter scores and high Detractor scores are indicators that you may need to consider making improvements in this area. Look closely at any verbatim comments that might clue you in on what issues seem important to your respondents. You may also find that your NPS differs significantly when compared to Regional or National scores. This can be an indicator that you are perceived as needing to make some improvements OR that you could be performing better in those areas. If it's the latter, try to decide what is working and strive to continue practices that support those methods.

Read the "One Thing" Comments. These are the ideas that respondents feel are the most important thing that can be approved by your council. Comb through these thoroughly – there are often some solid suggestions. They may not be able to pin point exactly the methods to improve it, but that is where the Key 3 and professional staff come in.

Communication and regular review with your Key 3 is essential in identifying trends over time and in some cases designing a plan of attack for hot issues.

Taking It to the Next Level

At the beginning of this project my original outline reflected what I saw the project to be on the surface and was as thorough an outline as I could forecast without understanding that continuing development of the VOS project at the National office would be delayed. There were also some developmental issues that did not occur to me from the beginning and were only fully realized after discussion with Tom Fitzgibbons, Deputy Chief Scout Executive, who served on the supervisory team for the Voice of the Scout project, and who I had the good fortune to run across at Philmont.

The pieces of the puzzle that are currently missing are the next two development phases that would allow district, and eventually unit, level feedback. My understanding is that both have been put on hold for the time being, so we seem to be at an impasse regarding further education and development of our commissioner staff.

I do know that national is not seeing the number of responses they need from units on a continual basis to make that unit level feedback viable for all councils. If the email saturation rate of Middle Tennessee is similar to other councils we are not casting a wide enough net to get the feedback we need. It seems unlikely at this point that we will see a unit level dashboard any time soon.

National has developed orientation materials for the next development phases and they currently sit in the JTE Resources files on the website, waiting to be used. In the meantime our council continues to struggle with providing a commissioner for each unit, as I am sure other councils do and a large number

of our District Key 3's continue to struggle with communication and organizational issues. District Committees continue to be understaffed or poorly staffed, which makes it difficult for commissioners to seek assistance from them for struggling units.

Missing an Opportunity

I do think that we are missing an opportunity if we do not move the VOS process forward at least one more step. As I stated earlier, it is my opinion that our districts currently struggle with staffing, communicating and planning. It is unfortunate that the District level feedback has not yet been made available as originally planned. As an active commissioner for some years now I have found that one of the biggest issues most commissioners have, when trying to assist a struggling unit, is seeking out assistance from the District Committee regarding program and other administrative issues not related directly to unit service.

The vehicle is there in the VOS report structure to encourage communication between the Key 3 and to more fully engage the District Committee in the success of all units. Including VOS feedback in monthly meetings allows the whole district to see more clearly the need for engagement of ALL the district volunteers. In addition, reviewing feedback on an ongoing basis can give a District Key 3 a clearer idea of where they might want to focus their efforts. It might also assist the District Committee in fully realizing what their roles are and how they fit into the process of helping units succeed.

What Can Be Done to Ensure Success

Middle Tennessee's current issue is viable email addresses. We continue to drop a point or two each cycle, fluctuating below the 55% Bronze requirement on JTE.

There is a method for identifying gaps in email data utilizing Scout Net, but council feels that confidentiality, data entry and the man hours required to capture and maintain this information would be difficult to maintain. There has been some effort by council to look at keying errors, but our numbers have continued to slip since July 2012. We have not made any gains in our email saturation numbers in several months, fluctuating between 51% and 52%. In my mind it may be time to try out the online tool to identify a district or two to tackle each quarter to attempt to improve these scores.

The Commissioner Staff continues to discuss specifics of the VOS Dashboard and have reviewed some comments. Our most recent Fall 2013 presentation included navigating the VOS page on My Scouting and learning how to read the Dashboard. The Commissioner's Cabinet was taken into a live dashboard during the presentation and we discussed Net Promoter Scores again, as well as what to look at in the summary and comment lines. Throughout this whole process we have encouraged sharing this information with each district's commissioner staff. We stress that promotion of the VOS program should happen at all levels. This will continue to be our focus even if the program does not move into another development phase.

Future Challenges

Some of the informational, and promotional, materials for Voice of the Scout still state that the program will seek out the input of scouts 14 years of age or older. Middle Tennessee and apparently other councils that I spoke with at PTC this past summer feel that there is no legitimate way to gather this information for the purpose of communicating with youth under 18. In discussing this with Tom Fitzgibbons – he too confirmed that there really is no viable method being considered by national at this time.

There seems to be a bump in the road when it comes to communicating exactly when a cycle will be turned on. If nothing else, reminders should be placed in Jet Trails, and other publications, that a cycle is about to begin **ahead of time**. It may help with participation and responses. Districts should also place the VOS release calendar in their planning sessions to make sure promotions are in full swing and encourage, over and over, the need for updated email addresses in My Scouting.

We have currently stopped our orientation sessions with the Commissioner Cabinet at the District level details, knowing that it may be some time before Unit level feedback is made available. However, if the program does move forward, it should be noted that the District Committee holds the responsibility of delivering this feedback after it is generated from a VOS cycle to the unit; the Unit Commissioner then sets an appointment to review the feedback with the Unit Key 3. Since staffing and organizing a District Committee seems to be an issue, this method may prove problematic and some attention should be paid to how well this process flows – at least in Middle Tennessee.

Presentation materials that I had developed for, and presented at, The Council Commissioner course at Philmont this past summer are awaiting word that we will move forward. I would love to use them to get our cabinet up to speed in Middle Tennessee.

Our DFS and I had discussed the need to assign District VOS Champions and earlier in 2013 I was approached by a couple of districts who showed interest in utilizing this position in order to market the program better. As of this writing the recruitment of these "Champions" has faltered. It is felt by some of the professionals that districts are struggling now to fill Commissioner and Committee positions. There has not been a consistent push by council to fully realize the potential of the "district champions" in educating and marketing at the district level and I have not pushed the issue since VOS development seems to be at a standstill.

Currently all "Experience Recoveries" are handled by our Director of Field Services, Martez Moore. On occasion a District Commissioner or District Executive will be invited to assist. While I understand that not every volunteer is capable of handling a hot issue I do think that these recoveries should be shared with the appropriate District Key 3. This is information that a DE can bring to the table when meeting with their Key 3 counterparts. Our DFS, Martez Moore has agreed that this type of communication is very productive and both the District Chair and District Commissioner should be aware of this type of information.

Conclusion

We may have stumbled a bit in delivering this program in Middle Tennessee Council, but Voice of the Scout pushes for action in areas that we should already be addressing as commissioners, and brings the

District Committee and all of the Key 3's (unit, district and council) into the picture of success for all units. Having a 360 degree view of how our organization and the delivery of our program are perceived is invaluable in taking the scouting movement forward.

What would things look like in our council if everyone bought into the concept of a fully functioning District Key 3 and a fully staffed, and functioning, District Committee? What would happen if this District Key 3 was able to view District specific comments from their volunteers and scouting families who want the program to succeed in their community. What would happen if this same Key 3 could see, in black and white, what these stakeholders view as areas that could be improved? My guess is that we would see a more accurate picture of how our program is perceived in that district and the Key 3's would feel empowered, along with their Commissioner staff and District Committees to solve their issues "geographically" and prioritize a plan of attack.