

# Why & How

## To make Scouts Canada Democratic

Report to the Board of Governors on  
behalf of the members of SCOUT *eh!*

January, 2005

Democracy is the worst form of government except for all  
those others that have been tried. — Winston Churchill

# Foreword

Dear friends in Scouting,

Scouting in Canada is at an unprecedented crossroads. Turning the wrong way could prove disastrous for the future of Scouts Canada as we know it. We have no room for second chances anymore. Sliding membership and the large exodus of volunteer leadership, with its corresponding impact on financing, have impacted us to a point where further decline will be disastrous.

This document represents what we at SCOUT *eh!* feel is a positive and constructive way to help stem the tide. We do not consider this task lightly. Our view is that people of vision will see the merits of democracy in our venerable institution and use it as a tool so as to promote vigorous discussion, a stabilization of membership, and to generate growth for the first time in many years.

We are in receipt of a copy of the Chief Commissioner's memo on strategic guidance. While this document is diverse and potentially far reaching, our view is that none of the proposed changes will be effective without democracy. Democracy is the point of the present document, so I will defer to the main text. However, I would like to address adult volunteers briefly in this overview.

Scouting is a local or grass roots endeavour. All that is really needed are some keen kids, a well trained Scouter, and a place to play the game. I would hazard a guess that the most important element in the above formula is the Scouter. Our organization has been blessed by many thousands of selfless and dedicated leaders over the years. We have spent countless hours and huge amounts of resources to ensure they are the best they can be. Training has been essential to their success and has given us an enormous resource of experience and creativity to draw on. It follows that we should do everything in our power to keep them on board.

With the unprecedented growth of SCOUT *eh!* over the last six months, we have found several issues that chronically crop up in the Scouts Canada complaint box. From coast-to-coast, the same things are heard at our meetings, discussion groups, in e-mails and during telephone calls. A substantial percentage of our leadership are desperately angry. There is an inordinate amount of angst, frustration, and helplessness among the rank and file. They feel disenfranchised, ill informed, and unwanted. A voluntary association cannot go on like this.

Democracy is the first step to bringing the volunteers back on side. The second is a volunteers' bill of rights and an ombudsman. This would greatly strengthen the organization.

Every voice is valued and needs to be heard. As difficult as that may be, it is the right thing to do.

And that starts with a vote.

We would like to attend the next Board meeting to make a presentation. At that time we will be prepared to answer any questions that you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

Scouter Michael P. Reid,  
Chair, SCOUT *eh!*

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# 1 Why Scouts Canada should be Democratic

Why is a democratic Scouts Canada better than what we have now? We do not seek democracy because it sounds nice or because it satisfies some nostalgic yearning. We seek democracy because it is an essential ingredient in a successful volunteer Movement, such as Scouting. The lack of democracy is the root cause of almost all of the problems facing Scouts Canada. It is the major reason why membership continues to fall. Fix governance, and other challenges either become fixable or solve themselves.

## 1.1 Commitment to the Movement

Scouting is a voluntary Movement. Scouts Canada cannot exist without the dedication of tens of thousands of volunteers across the country. How do we motivate these volunteers? Our volunteers stay because they have made a commitment to Scouting. Why do people make this commitment? There are so many other things Scouters could be doing with their time. Scouters volunteer because we believe in the Mission of Scouting. We believe in helping young people learn outdoor skills, values, teamwork, and leadership.

Education pioneer Lloyd Dennis wrote, “[A] thriving learning environment can only exist when teachers feel a sense of mission and dedication based on pride and empowerment” (“Unblock our young minds”, *The Globe and Mail*, November 18, 2003). The same principle applies to Scouters, but more so because we are not paid. Our dedication to the Mission of Scouting must be supported by a feeling of pride and empowerment.

Feeling pride and empowerment is the very opposite of being a cog in the machine. A cog is simply expected to follow the rules and do what it is told. No volunteer wants to do this. Scouters must feel that this is our Movement and that we are part of a national team of people working together to make Scouting happen.

Currently, decisions are made by a small group of people who have not been elected by the membership. These decisions are brought forward by a group of commissioners appointed from above. Rainbow, Akela, and Skip are expected to follow. In greater and greater numbers, they are not. Adult membership decline is steady and rapid. People do not want to volunteer for an association that does not trust them enough to involve them in the decision-making process.

In order for people to feel that they are part of a team, the level of involvement in the decision-making process must be far more than the odd consultation. It must be a truly democratic system that allows everyone to vote.

While many members are leaving Scouts Canada, lessened commitment to the Movement does not always mean that people leave Scouting. There is also a less visible problem: Some volunteers remain members, but scale back their involvement. For example, we know of many Scouters who in the past were active in organization program events, as trainers, and in many other ways. Now, they just work with their own troop or just attend Gilwell club meetings. This dramatic reduction in Scouting participation does not show up on membership charts, but it has huge impact in the quality of Scouting.

The report of the Vision Task Group chaired by Ian Mack included a section which read:

Better reflect in practises and procedures relating to retention, recognition, rewards, support, training and **influence in governance**, that leaders working directly with youth are the most important volunteers in the organization. (Emphasis added.)

So far, nothing has been done to improve influence in governance. There is nothing about this in the recently circulated draft strategic directions. Has this been abandoned?

Adults are leaving Scouting or scaling back their involvement because they do not feel they are part of the team. Democracy puts the volunteer in the driver's seat. It will vastly renew and strengthen the commitment to Scouting of our adult volunteers.

## 1.2 Moral Authority & Risk Management

Clearly, Scouts Canada needs to make some changes to adapt to modern society. Setting a direction for change is easy. Getting people to buy in and put the change into practice is the hard part. At the moment, many national and local initiatives are simply ignored by the membership. This happens because the Board and the commissioners at all levels lack moral authority.

The lack of moral authority means more than just a rough time for commissioners trying to move the organization forward. Without moral authority behind the rules and policies of the association, members feel no need to follow them beyond the extent to which they can be enforced. That's not very far in a voluntary organization. This opens the door to considerable liability and risk management issues.

People follow moral authority because they believe it is right. Even people who do not agree with a new direction will usually follow it if they have confidence in the leadership proposing the change. A popular mandate, which comes from the vote, gives leaders moral authority. If Scouts Canada's leadership had the moral authority that comes from the vote, there would be vastly more co-operation and compliance with new initiatives and policies.

## 1.3 Variety of Viewpoints

Democracy ensures that the widest range of viewpoints and the most creative ideas are included in the decision-making process. Organizations often suffer from a "broken telephone" problem. In the current system, if a section Scouter notices a problem requiring a policy change, they can talk to the Group Commissioner, who can bring it up at the area meetings (if they happen regularly). The Area Commissioner could then bring it up at the council. The Council Commissioner could bring that to the program forum at the National meeting where it could be picked up by the members of the Board for discussion.

This is a very long process and by the time the message gets to the Board for decision-making, it has been distorted beyond recognition, just like in the child's game where a message is passed around the circle by whispering it in the ear of the next person.

A democratic system means that section Scouters and the youth members eligible to vote have direct control of the decision-making process. It would mean a large population of people with many varied experiences from which to draw members of the Board. A

democratic process ensures that many ideas can be examined and the best parts of each applied to manage the challenges that face the Movement.

## 1.4 Scouting's Values

In its publication, *The Essential Characteristics of Scouting*, the World Organization of the Scout Movement (1998, p. 25) states that,

A voluntary movement depends upon **participation** of all its members, male and female, young as well as older, at all levels, **in the decision-making process**. As part-owners, or “stakeholders” in the Movement, they must be actively involved in managing its affairs in a democratic manner. (Emphasis in original.)

At the 33rd World Scout Conference meeting in Bangkok, Thailand in 1993, the WOSM passed a resolution declaring that, “Scouting is a Movement based on democratic principles”.

How can we teach Scouts to live in democratic patrols if the wider Scout association is not democratic? Many Scouters do not make use of the Court of Honour nor do they allow substantial youth input into program planning. Why should they, if they themselves are denied input at other levels of the organization?

To be non-democratic is to go against the fundamental values for which Scouting stands.

## 1.5 Canadian Values

In four provinces and nationally, our governments are discussing reforming the electoral system. There is acknowledged dissatisfaction with the first-past-the-post system. There is a growing belief that business corporations must be more accountable to society. In these ways, Canadian society is moving in the direction of more accountability and better democracy. The governance of Scouts Canada is inconsistent with this. Democracy is a fundamental Canadian value. Scouts Canada will be far more successful by recognizing this fact.

## 1.6 Conclusion

Will Rogers said, “If you’re riding’ ahead of the herd, take a look back every now and then to make sure it’s still there.” The general membership of Scouts Canada and the national leadership are both deeply committed to Scouting. Unfortunately, they are moving in different directions. Right now, Scouting needs more than competent management. It needs national leadership that will inspire members to do more for Scouting. It needs leadership that has the confidence *of* the membership and confidence *in* the membership. These things can only be obtained through democracy.

At the moment, many, many volunteers are nearing the end of their patience. In discussions with Scouters across the country, some SCOUT *eh!* members and some not, many have said that after this year, they will quit or move to the BP Scouts. We in SCOUT *eh!* have been able to convince many Scouters to be patient and give Scouts Canada one last chance to change. But their patience will not last.

At the time of writing, SCOUT *eh!* has 430 Members and continues to grow. These are all registered members of Scouts Canada who want change. As with every organization that takes a stand, there are many more silent supporters than members. Scouting cannot afford to lose these. The future without democracy is very bleak.

In a democratic Scouts Canada, the members would feel like valued members of the team. They would be inspired to deepen their commitment to Scouting. They would feel confident in following the new initiatives that are needed to turn Scouting around.

Some people say it cannot be done. It can. And the sooner the better.

## 2 How to make Scouts Canada Democratic

This section describes a method of bringing democracy to Scouts Canada. This method can be implemented without any changes to the Bylaw. Once the first elected Board is in place, that Board would have the mandate to formalize in the Bylaw the new method of selecting the Board.

### 2.1 Basic Assumptions

#### 2.1.1 National Board

A successful national organization must have a national board with the ability to rapidly and effectively provide policy and leadership for the association. Any model that depends on extreme decentralization is really an model that moves away from the idea of a single, national organization. Thus Scouts Canada should retain the Board of Governors as the policy making body. This report is about how that board is selected.

#### 2.1.2 Popular Mandate

In order to have democracy, the National Board must be selected in a way that gives it a popular mandate. This means that the general membership of Scouts Canada must have the vote. Obviously, a five-year-old Beaver does not have a sufficient understanding of the issues to make an informed vote. Of course, their interests must still be represented. Certainly, by the time a Scout reaches age 18 and are able to vote in governmental election, they must also be allowed to vote in Scouts Canada elections.

The age cut-off for voting must fall somewhere between 5 and 18. Since Scouting is a youth movement and a movement in which we train young people in leadership, it follows that Scouts Canada should have a younger voting age than for governmental elections. SCOUT *eh!* recommends that this age be 16. However, the exact age is an implementation detail, the discussion of which must not overshadow the main point, which is to give the vote to the general membership.

### 2.2 The Basic Model

Scouts Canada does not need to break new ground to figure out a way to be democratic. We can follow the lead of one of Canada's most successful national not-for-profit organizations, Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC).

MEC is Canada's largest supplier of outdoor equipment. As a co-operative, it was founded not to make money, but to serve the needs of its members who were unable to buy quality outdoor equipment at reasonable prices. Since its goal is serving its members, MEC is a democratic organization. MEC's board is directly elected by its membership over the age of 16.

This is how the election works: Every year, the MEC catalogue invites members to submit nominations for people to sit on MEC's board. Nominations must be supported by five MEC members. Every spring, MEC members receive a voting package in the mail. In the package

is an election booklet with statements provided by the candidates, voting instructions, and the member's PIN. Members use their member number and PIN to vote on a secure web site or by phone. They may also request a printed ballot and vote by mail. The entire election is run by an independent accounting firm to guaranty the fairness of the vote.

This system is simple, fair, and inexpensive. Research by SCOUT *eh!* indicates that this voting system would cost Scouts Canada about \$2 per member, a small price for democracy and one that members are more then willing to pay. This system would avoid politicizing Scouting by limiting campaigning to the written statement.

## **2.3 Steps to a Democratic Scouts Canada**

This section describes the steps that can be taken to make Scouts Canada democratic for a reasonable price, in a reasonable amount of time, and without initially changing the Bylaw.

### **2.3.1 Nominations**

Through the *Leader* magazine, web sites, and direct email, all Scouts Canada members are invited to submit nominations for the Board. All members 18 and older are eligible to be nominated. Nominations must include the signatures of five other members and a brief statement. All nominations are published on the Scouts Canada web site and in the *Leader* magazine.

### **2.3.2 Elections**

Under the supervision of an independent firm with knowledge of conducting elections, every eligible voter is mailed an election package with directs them to where they can read the nomination statements, and provides voting instructions and their PIN. The election firm organizes voting on the web or by phone. All members of Scouts Canada 16 and older are eligible to vote.

Once the votes are counted, the following people would be considered elected to the Board:

- The person with the greatest number of votes from each province and one such person from the North (11 in total).
- Of the remaining people, the four youth members with the greatest number of votes.
- Of the remaining people, the six members with the greatest number of votes.

These elected members elect from among themselves the two Vice-Chairs and a person to recommend to the Chief Scout for the position of Chief Commissioner.

### **2.3.3 Nominating Committee Report**

The persons elected as above are the only people named in the report of the nominating committee (in addition to the nominations for Past Chief Commissioner, Honorary Officers, and the Honorary Legal Council).

### **2.3.4 Acceptance at the AGM**

At the AGM, the Voting Members accept the report of the nominating committee. At this point, the new Board is a democratically elected board.

### **2.3.5 Formalization in the Bylaw**

The new democratic Board would consult with the membership and draft such changes to the Bylaw as are required to formalize the new, democratic structure. Upon the approval of such changes, Scouts Canada will be truly democratic.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

This document has provided a workable and affordable way to make Scouts Canada democratic. There are details, such as the voting age, that could be settled one way or another. Time must not be wasted on endless debates of these details. The fundamental characteristic of democracy is that it gives the vote to the general membership of Scouts Canada. This is one characteristic that must be present in any democratic system.