

From the National Office of the Boy Scouts of America

Advice for personal and unit Web sites

While units and members act as private individuals when communicating with the public, the National Council provides the following advice for those who use the Internet to promote and support their units or to communicate to the public about Scouting:

Decorum

Scouters should exercise propriety and good taste. Remember that the Internet (including Web sites, chat rooms, bulletin boards, and even e-mail messages) is a public medium. Your conduct reflects not only on yourself and your unit, but also on the entire Scouting movement whenever the audience knows you are a Scouter.

Personal Safety

While most Internet users are honest, there is a criminal element that seeks information as a way to gain access to victims. For that reason, be especially careful about providing any personal information—names, e-mail addresses, phone numbers, etc. Always get written permission before posting personal information about adult volunteers, and never publish personal information about youth members. If you display or post images of adult and youth members involved in Scouting activities on your Web site, you should first obtain written permissions from the adults and the parents or guardians of any youth members.

Legal Issues

Myriad federal and state laws govern publishing in any medium, including the Internet—copyright infringement, privacy of information, defamation, etc. You should familiarize yourself with these laws so you can ensure that the information you publish doesn't create any legal problems for you or your chartered organization. Key among these legal issues are that (1) you should never collect personal information about youth members over the Internet, and (2) you should never reproduce or display on your Web sites content from some other source without written permission.

BSA Policies and Procedures

All policies and procedures that apply to any activity are still in effect when that activity is conducted on the Internet. For example, any online recruiting must be done in accordance with policies and procedures that govern offline recruiting.

In addition to these general guidelines, local councils may develop their own more detailed guidelines for unit Web sites. Local councils may require units to meet council guidelines for their sites to be recognized (linked) from the local council's own Web site.