



## Membership Standards Study Initiative Executive Summary

In February, the Boy Scouts of America embarked on the most comprehensive listening exercise in its history to consider the impact of potential changes to its membership standards policy on the organization and gather perspectives from inside and outside of the Scouting family. The following is an executive summary of the findings from study groups created to reach out and explore the point of view of the various Scouting members, parents, youth, donors, and strategic partners within the Boy Scouts of America.

- Throughout this process, the BSA conducted a thorough review of a number of issues related to the impact of the policy or potential changes to the policy on Scouting. This review created an outpouring of feedback from the Scouting family and the American public, from both those who agree with the current policy and those who support a change. This feedback reinforced how deeply people care about Scouting and how passionate they are about the organization.
- Scouting's review confirmed that this remains among the most complex and challenging issues facing the BSA and society today. Even with the wide range of input, it is extremely difficult to accurately quantify the potential impact of maintaining or changing the current policy. While perspectives and opinions vary significantly, parents, adults in the Scouting community, and teens alike tend to agree that youth should not be denied the benefits of Scouting.

Overall key findings that the Executive Committee considered to be critical to the development of a resolution:

- Attitudes and opinions among Americans related to gay and lesbian relationships have changed rapidly over the past three years.
- While a majority of adults in the Scouting community support the BSA's current policy of excluding open and avowed homosexuals, younger parents and teens tend to oppose the policy.
- Views among parents under the age of 50 have changed significantly in the past three years, with a majority now opposing the BSA's current policy.
- Parents in three of four BSA regions oppose the current membership policy.
- Of six scenarios presented in surveys to parents, teens, and members of the Scouting community, the one scenario with which overwhelming majorities of parents, teens, and members of the Scouting community strongly agree is that it would be unacceptable to deny an openly gay Scout an Eagle Scout Award solely because of his sexual orientation.
- Parents, teens, and the Scouting community do not favor a local chartered organization option.
- While adults in the Scouting community strongly support the current membership policy, they are less likely to agree with removing a Scout from the program solely on the basis of sexual orientation as opposed to behavior.





*The following represents summaries of each stakeholder segment.*

### **Youth Study Group**

The Youth Study Group (teens 16 to 18) was charged with listening to the voice of youth—both current members and nonmembers. Harris Interactive was contracted to survey both current youth members as well as general population teens. Key findings include:

- Among general population teens and Boy Scouts and Venturers alike, a majority oppose the current Boy Scouts of America membership policy.
- A majority of Boy Scouts and Venturers oppose allowing chartered organizations to follow their own beliefs if that means there will be different standards from one organization to the next.
- According to a majority of current Boy Scouts and Venturers, the current policy does not represent a core value of Scouting.

### **Parents Study Group and Leaders Study Group**

The Parents Study Group was charged with listening to the voice of parents and leaders, including parents who currently do not have youth in the program. Research on parents was conducted by North Star Opinion Research on parents of boys younger than 18—both members and nonmembers.

- The research finds a significant shift in attitudes regarding the BSA policy on homosexuality.
- Three years ago, parents supported the current BSA policy by a wide margin—58 percent to 29 percent. Today, parents oppose the policy by a 45 percent to 42 percent margin.
- Three years ago, 57 percent of parents of current Scouts supported the policy. Today, only 48 percent of parents of current Scouts support the policy.

The BSA's Voice of the Scout Membership Standards Survey was sent to more than 1 million adult members, with over 200,000 respondents. The survey found:

- Respondents support the current policy by a 61 percent to 34 percent margin.
- Support for the current policy is higher at different program and volunteer levels in the organization:
  - 50 percent of Cub Scout parents support it; 45 percent of Cub Scout parents oppose.
  - 61 percent of Boy Scout parents support it.
  - 62 percent of unit leaders support it.
  - 64 percent of council and district volunteers support it.
  - 72 percent of chartered organizations support it.





### **Local Council Study Group**

The Local Council Study Group was charged with listening to the voice of the Boy Scouts of America's 280 local councils. While many of the conversations centered on a policy that would give chartered organizations the discretion of whether to accept avowed homosexuals to serve as leaders, many groups had concerns about this concept:

- 50.5 percent of councils recommend no change.
- 38.5 percent of councils recommend a change.
- 11 percent take a neutral position.

Each Scouting region also provided a recommendation in support of or opposed to potential change:

- The Central Region recommends, on behalf of its 73 councils, no change to the policy.
- The Northeast Region recommends, on behalf of its 65 councils, to change the policy by excluding any reference to sexual preference as one of the criteria for membership for youth and adults.
- The Southern Region recommends, on behalf of its 90 councils, no change to the current policy.
- The recommendation of 51 percent of the Western Region councils is no change at this time. Several councils within the Western Region were unable to provide a recommendation. The position of the Western Region's largest chartered organization, whose members make up more than half of the region's total membership, is unknown at this time.

### **National Council Study Group**

The National Council Study Group was charged with listening to the voice of the National Executive Board and National Advisory Council. In an online survey:

- Slightly more members of the Board and Advisory Council initially supported the current policy, but Board members reversed themselves to slightly opposing the current rules after responding to the scenarios.
- A majority of the Board does not consider the current policy to be core to Scouting's values, while a majority of the Advisory Council does.
- A large majority of the respondents believe they can find a way to continue in Scouting whether or not the BSA's decision agrees with their own views.

### **Chartered Organization Study Group**

The Chartered Organization Study Group was charged with listening to the voice of the national-level leadership in the BSA's major chartered organizations. The BSA contacted 64 religious chartered organizations and 54 nonreligious chartered organizations. The BSA's largest chartered organization, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is not included in these totals.





Many religious chartered organizations stated their concern is with homosexual adult leaders and not with youth. They estimate a membership policy change that includes both youth and adults could cause the BSA to incur membership losses in a range from 100,000 to 350,000. It is believed any gain in membership because of a change to the membership policy related to youth and adults would be in the range of 10,000 to 20,000 youth.

A change in the membership policy specific to youth only would be consistent with the religious beliefs of the BSA's major chartered organizations.

### **Finance and Fundraising Study Group**

The Finance and Fundraising Study Group was charged with listening to the voice of the donor as well as evaluating the National Council financial impact related to projected changes in the BSA's membership policy.

- Councils indicate 33 percent of their major donors support a policy change.
- On average, councils indicate 51 percent of major donors do not support a policy change.
- A majority of current and former corporations that currently have or had sponsorship-type relationships with the BSA do not support the current policy.
- A majority of the Fortune 500 companies support a change in our current policy.
- A survey of alumni and the National Eagle Scout Association show that 54 percent support the current policy; 41 percent oppose it.
- Foundation and major donor groups are split regarding the BSA's current membership policy.

### **Legal Study Group**

The Legal Study Group was charged with gathering opinions on the possible litigation and other legal implications of a change in the membership standards from the legal community and providing an analysis on the related legal issues.

Legal advice and analysis on the possible legal implications and potential effects of a change in the BSA's membership policy were considered.

It was clarified that there will be no change in the BSA's defense and indemnification of claims arising out of any claim related to a denial of membership or participation in Scouting activities because of a failure to meet the BSA's membership standards.





## **Additional Information**

### **Youth Protection**

Youth safety and role modeling are two of the biggest concerns mentioned by members who oppose a change in the policy. In addressing issues related to youth protection for the membership standards study, the Boy Scouts of America tasked its director of Youth Protection, Michael V. Johnson, to consult with leading experts in the field of youth protection and child sexual abuse prevention that the BSA has consulted in the past in formulating the BSA's Youth Protection policies and curriculum:

- David Finkelhor, Ph.D.
- W. Walter Menninger, M.D., psychiatry
- Charol Shakeshaft, Ph.D.
- Victor Vieth, J.D.

All four experts were consistent in their findings and recommendations, including:

- “The nearly universal opinion among sexual abuse authorities is that same-sex sexual interest or same-sex sexual experience, either in adults or youth, is NOT a risk factor for sexually abusing children.”
- In regard to role modeling: “Most of the research on the effect on children of associating with self-identified homosexual adults has been done about homosexual parents. The clear conclusion from this research is that there appear to be no effects on children’s adjustment, mental health or sexual orientation.”

### **National Youth-Serving Organizations**

The BSA contacted 30 national youth-serving, government, foundation, and community organizations (many of which are strategic partners of the BSA), and asked to what extent they support or oppose the current BSA policy:

- Twenty-eight want change and oppose the current BSA policy, one is neutral and somewhat opposes the policy, and one wants no change and supports the current policy.
- The main concern of the 28 organizations that want the BSA to change is that if the policy remains the same, national organizations cannot support the BSA, making it very difficult for those organizations to work/collaborate with the BSA because of the exclusion of youth and lack of diversity in the BSA.

