

The Conclave Experience...



**Report of the
2007 Conclave
Best Practices
Task Force**



Foreword

Think back to your *first* conclave... from the anticipation of meeting Arrowmen from other lodges, to the spirit and pride felt as your lodge competed, to the shows and training that revealed new ideas and opportunities for you... yes, **conclave is an experience!** The section conclave experience is like no other in Scouting, as Arrowmen new and old gather yearly to learn, remember, enjoy, meet, lead, do, compete, consume, watch, elect, and rededicate, all packed into the short span of a weekend.

Each year, about 19,000 Arrowmen attend one of 47 section conclaves held around the country, making conclave the largest annual inter-council activity within Scouting. As such, conclave provides us with our most influential opportunity to capture the interest and dedication of new Arrowmen, while rekindling the spirit of our long-time members.

With this opportunity comes the challenge to provide the most memorable conclave experience obtainable. Through this report, we bring you the insight and feedback of our section leadership, and trust that it will enhance the section's role in creating and administering more effective programs that support the overall objectives of the Order of the Arrow.

2007 Conclave Best Practices National Task Force

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From the beginning, our Brotherhood has searched for ways to share ideas and experiences between lodges. As our organization expanded, the regional structure became a geographically logical avenue to bring lodges together in a way that would promote continuity, and provide a way to strengthen lodge programs through exchange of ideas.

By 1948, national leadership recognized the benefit for a structure to include area chiefs in the planning process for national events. Lodges were assigned to “areas” within their region, and it was up to the lodges within that area to develop their own agenda for their meeting.

By the mid-1950’s, most areas had established an annual fellowship event, commonly called an area conference, where the usual schedule of events included discussion groups for idea sharing, as well as ceremony presentations, where lodges were assigned to perform a ceremony as a “best practice” example.

Throughout the years, areas and sections have met yearly, expanding their agenda to improve the experience for their participants. With this report, we review those traditions and successful programs from across our Brotherhood, and bring together the ideas and best practices to benefit all sections.

Why Conclave?

To better understand why it is important to review our conclave practices, let’s review why we have conclave. The “Field Operations Guide” states that “the section exists to provide a direct inter-council forum for lodge and chapter leaders, bringing them together for fellowship and mutual improvement through the exchange of ideas”, and an annual meeting of the delegates of the lodges provides many of the methods used to accomplish this. Within a conclave, we have the opportunity:

- To provide a structure for leadership skill development and organizational planning for our lodge and section youth leadership,
- To foster lodge and council program enhancement through shared learning,
- To expose our members to ideas that will enhance their retention as active Arrowmen and Scouts,
- To solidify our heritage of brotherhood through fellowship and renewing of friendships, and,

- To elect section officers, and a section chief that will become a part of a national planning process, which will allow him the opportunity to serve as a national officer.

With this in mind, let's now look at the conclave experience in the manner that we presented our survey, dividing our inquiry between the "Necessities" of conclave, and then "Everything Else". To gain insight into what our sections are finding successful in achieving the above objectives, we asked specific questions relative to the traditional events of a conclave, and offer selected answers along with a synopsis of the overall responses.

Part 1 - The "Necessities" of Conclave

Training

"The conclave program should increase the knowledge and understanding of the delegates in all aspects of Order of the Arrow program." FOG, page 42

Conclave is the section's most influential opportunity to serve as a conduit for sharing successful ideas and program helps among its lodges, as well as providing a training ground for development of trainers past the lodge level. As such, conclave training should be considered at the top of the list of program elements of a successful conclave.

What have been your most popular training sessions? To what would you attribute their success?

Here are some selected answers:

"...training sessions related to conducting ceremonies are the most consistently attended. The topics include performance techniques, props and costumes, and staging ceremonies."

"American Indian crafts are always a hit."

"...our most popular sessions are "Cool Camp Gadgets", "Primitive Fire Building", and "Making Meetings Fun"."

We found that the most popular training sessions involve the following characteristics:

- **Innovative**
- **Hands-on** and
- **Age-relevant**

Innovative: Conclave delegates want to know how to do “it” better! Whether that means how to improve their camping skills, or ways to increase chapter meeting attendance, they want to learn of innovative and fun ideas that others have experienced and found to be helpful.

Hands-on: “Doing” is at the heart of Scouting, and Scouts and Scouters enjoy sessions where they can interact, and learn by doing. Training sessions that allow participants to “try as they learn”... such as campfire cooking techniques, or “build and take home”... such as beadwork techniques, offer interesting options from the traditional LLD-type sessions. Plus, these sessions often discover and utilize trainers with different talents, allowing a broader trainer base within the section.

Age-relevant: Stated simply, adults and youth members are not often interested in the same topics! Discover and offer topics that youth members will want to attend - things that catch their eye and peak their interest, such as “Using your computer for Campfire Shows”, “ICE Magic” (incorporating theatrical ‘magic’ into inductions and ceremonial events), and “Pro Patch Design”.

The same works for our adult members. While their interest may be peaked by the session titles above, they are more likely to have an interest in improving programs that they are actively involved with, such as chapter management or ceremonies advisership. Be sure to create some session offerings that satisfy their desire to learn how others are successfully handling the challenges that adults face with the OA program, particularly at the chapter and unit level.

Other “pearls” from the survey that were notable include:

- Offering Youth Protection as a perpetual session, which provides an ongoing opportunity for adults to maintain this requirement.
- Offering a “Train the Trainer” track of sessions, designed to discover and cultivate up-and-coming lodge trainer prospects, which will improve LLD training, and ultimately increase the pool of qualified trainers at the section level.
- Creating groupings of sessions based on topic (e.g. leadership development, outdoor skills workshops, ceremony/dance workshops), and encourage participants to choose at least one from each grouping.
- Creating one or more adult-specific training sessions, based on solicited input from adult members as to what they feel is the most relevant.
- Considering some non-OA Scouting topics, such as “How to Assemble a Scouting Event Staff”, which will appeal to those not directly involved in assigned OA advisership roles.

How many training sessions do you offer? When do you offer them, and why at those times?

Most sections responded with the typical “Saturday morning training” time block, usually with three 45 to 50 minute blocks. The number of sessions offered seems to parallel the typical delegate attendance of the section, and ranged from 6 total sessions to over 50.

In an effort to make training sessions more accessible to all delegates, some sections are experimenting with offering afternoon training options in addition to the traditional morning offerings. This appeals to those sections where morning training sessions conflict with ceremonies competitions, allowing delegates who plan to participate in or watch ceremonies competitions to also have the opportunity to experience the training offered.

Do you consider Lodge “best practice” demonstrations, workshops, or skill sessions to be a part of training? If not, do you offer these otherwise?

In general, the response to this was: “No, but that’s a great idea!” A few sections have a lodge booth or display competition, but they are not using them for idea sharing.

Here are a couple of ideas that came from these responses:

- The “Idea Arcade” - each lodge participates in a “midway” at their Friday night cracker barrel, by creating an interactive booth that shows off a particular skill or program success that they want to share. This may be general and hands-on in nature, such as “Creative Campfire Cooking”, or more Quality Lodge oriented, such as “Inspirational Troop Visitation Ideas”. Whatever the skill presented, this improves the overall opportunity for delegate interaction and exchange of ideas, and serves as a source of pride for the lodges who participate, regardless of their size.

- “How We Won It” Training Sessions - For those sections who have competitions in administrative events (newsletter, website, planbook, where to go camping guide), this idea takes the winner of those competitions and asks them to put on a training session the following year on how they accomplished their winning entry. This helps spread the winning ideas out so that all lodges in the section can benefit from them, and causes the winning lodge to keep thinking of ways to improve what they do. This is a win-win for all, and achieves the true purpose of conclave.

Do you promote your training sessions prior to or during conclave, or provide pre-registration of specific sessions?

Promotion of training sessions prior to conclave increases the importance of training to the delegates, by putting the spotlight on it as one of the key components of conclave. In addition, delegates can choose ahead of time the sessions that interest them, which can serve as an effective promotional tool for conclave itself. And, given the busy schedule and time constraints of conclave, delegates who are introduced to and choose sessions that interest them are more likely to attend training as part of their weekend.

Those that promote and use pre-registration do so in the following ways:

- One section publishes a conclave training “Promo Pack”, containing a list and description of the training offerings, along with a registration sheet. Each lodge adviser is asked to distribute these to his delegates, and be responsible for collecting the registration sheets and returning the data to the conclave training chairman. These “Promo Packs” are usually distributed two months prior to conclave, such that the lodge adviser can plan to distribute them at a lodge function (during a conclave contingent meeting), and then take up the registration form at the end of the meeting.

The training chairman then organizes the data, and provides the lodge adviser with a list of his delegates and which sessions they have chosen. This list is then used by the lodge adviser to help determine training session participation/attendance at the conclave. In addition, each delegate’s original registration form is kept by the lodge adviser, and given back to the delegate on arrival at conclave, to remind him of what classes he selected.

- Sections that routinely use online delegate registration have often expanded this to include online course registration for their training sessions.
- While not actual pre-registration, another section provides a conclave schedule with blanks where the training sessions are, and on arrival at conclave they encourage the delegate to review the list of sessions offered and write them in their schedule, along with the location of their session choices. Since delegates typically carry their schedule in their pocket, this is a handy way for delegates to give some advance consideration to the offerings, and write out their plan for the weekend.

This pre-registration data is also used to choose training sites which are appropriate for the class size, and also to eliminate or combine sessions in which no interest is shown. This improves conclave efficiency, and maximizes the use of available resources.

Do you offer any awards or special recognition for training attendance?

Our sections recognize that attendance at training sessions is an important measure of the success of conclave, and therefore most sections create incentive for attendance. Much like the NOAC concept, some sections use a conclave participation award, integrating training attendance into the overall requirements, while other sections use training attendance as part of an overall conclave spirit award, given to the lodge who achieves the best overall participation in offered program events.

A few sections quoted administrative difficulties as the reason for abandoning recognition for training attendance. Most sections use a simple participation award card, asking the delegate to have it signed, stamped, etc. for proof of attendance. Others give out tokens, to be taken back to the lodge adviser in exchange for the participation award, or a bead system - adding a bead to a leather strip for each session or program event attended, which can be hung from the uniform pocket button during conclave.

Here are two more ideas worth noting for their creativity:

- Tying together training and recreation, one section has a “youth-only” patch auction, at which only “conclave cash” may be used to bid on and purchase auction items. This “conclave cash” can only be obtained through attendance and participation at the training sessions, and the amount given is at the discretion of the trainer, based on participation in the session. Not only does this reward attendance and stimulates youth participation, it also creates anticipation toward a fun event later in the weekend.
- Using the conclave patch design or weekend theme, another section creates a puzzle of cards with a portion of the design/theme on each card, that when put together completes the design/theme. These puzzle cards are given out at training events, as well as the other scheduled events. The completed puzzle can then be presented as evidence of completion of the participation award, or presented to the trading post to purchase a special patch, or even for credit toward the purchase of trading post items.

Perhaps the training incentive idea with the most momentum involves the “university degree” concept. Several sections are adopting this, which offers a logical progression of knowledge on specific subjects, and recognition based on attendance of these progressive course offerings within a specific discipline.

The basic premise of this concept is outlined below:

An “OA University” is established, consisting of “colleges” which focus on specific interest areas involving the Scouting and/or OA program, such as Lodge Administration and Leadership, American Indian Activities, Induction and Ceremonial Events, and General Studies. Bachelor’s, Master’s, and PhD “degrees” are awarded, based on completion of the required courses for each degree level. These degrees usually involve

at least one year each, and therefore attaining a PhD degree would require attendance at a minimum of three conclaves.

For each degree, courses are offered which are appropriate to the degree level, e.g. introductory level courses are offered for the bachelor's program. Recognition is given on completion of each degree, usually in the form of a certificate, although a patch with pins added for each completed degree is also used. Each "college" often is recognized by a different patch.

This concept offers some interesting benefits. First, it provides an established introductory training track for "first-time" conclave delegates, while still providing them some choice based on their interests, and offers them incentive to return in future years for more "advanced" training. Second, by offering degrees in different colleges, it creates several years' worth of options and incentive for seasoned conclave veterans to continue attending conclave training. Third, requiring PhD degree candidates to teach bachelor's and master's level courses provides a ready supply of trainers for the courses at these lower levels. In addition, requirements can be created for each degree that involve some "outside work", such as being a trainer at their lodge's LLD during the coming year.

Do you have any other conclave training success stories to share?

Based on the responses, here are some ideas to consider:

- Using "guest" trainers from outside the section often improves the "draw", and introduces delegates and lodges to new and different ways to accomplish similar goals.
- Creating adult-only and youth-only sessions can be worthwhile for topics involving lodge and chapter administration.
- Offering a Chapter Adviser's Discussion Forum, where topics have been solicited and reviewed prior to conclave. This can be helpful to most adults, including those first-year adults.
- Using Lodge Assistance Program visitations to determine appropriate training needs for the lodges in the section.
- Creating a "First-Year Program" for first-time conclave delegates. This involves a morning training track that is specifically designed for first-year Arrowmen, and culminates in a VIA lunch. Between each morning training session, these first-year Arrowmen are greeted by Ordeal ceremony principals, who remind and explain to them what they experienced in their induction ceremonies.

Elections

When do you hold your section elections? Why is that time chosen in the weekend agenda?

Most sections determine this based on providing maximal exposure of the candidates to the conclave delegates. In smaller sections, where travel time is not a significant issue, section officer elections are usually held on Sunday morning, after a period of worship and before the closing show. In sections where long travel times typically create contingent departures early Sunday morning, elections are usually held at a dining hall assembly Saturday evening, either right before the evening meal, or right after.

One perceived benefit of holding elections on Saturday evening is that the newly-elected officers have the remainder of the weekend to “network” and enlist Arrowmen to serve on section committees for the upcoming year.

How is the election process done? (secret ballot, by lodge, by individual, anything unique, etc.) Do you do anything special prior to or after the election?

While the FOG outlines the process adequately, we found that variety and tradition are still alive in this process. Again, the primary consideration is providing ample opportunity for officer candidates to meet and interact with delegates from all lodges.

Based on the responses, here is list of stepwise practices that are worth considering in this process:

- To maximize exposure, officer candidates may be nominated at a council of chiefs meeting on the Friday night of conclave. This allows the Saturday morning conclave newsletter to announce and provide bios of the candidates. However, as per the FOG, nominations are not officially closed until just before the elections at the conclave business meeting.
- All candidates may be interviewed by the section adviser and staff adviser, to make sure that they understand the duties for the job they are seeking, as well as the election process. This can be done late Friday night, after the council of chiefs meeting nominations.
- A Saturday lunch “meet the candidates” forum may be held, to allow initial group contact with introductory speeches and questions from the floor.
- A conclave business meeting is held, either Saturday evening or Sunday depending on schedule appropriateness and delegate attendance, during which officers are elected.

At the conclave business meeting, sections are split between casting votes by secret ballot or aloud. Those that do this aloud do so in a political convention format, allowing each lodge to “brag” about their lodge, much like the states do when casting their votes at a national political convention, prior to casting their votes. This provides some added excitement to the process, and provides a format for the lodges to voice pride in their accomplishments to their fellow lodges.

Registration

What is your usual conclave fee? Do you have a late fee or early-bird discount?

A review of these responses reveals that a section conclave is quite possibly the best value in our yearly Scouting agenda. Sections are keeping conclave delegate costs to a median figure of \$30 by staying in council camps or tent camping around high schools. Those that occasionally use college campuses generally pay more, averaging around \$75 per participant.

The biggest potential challenge in establishing cost can be determining a reasonable expected attendance figure on which to establish adequate food preparation. Most sections attempt this by using a 3-tier payment system, charging a base fee for those that register by a specific deadline, with added fees for late pre-registration and on-site registration, hoping to discourage on-site registration through exorbitant fees.

To minimize the administrative hassles of a 3-tier payment system, one section establishes a standard fee for conclave, regardless of registration status. However, to reward those lodges that meet the recommended pre-registration deadline, trading post rebates are given in the form of credits that can be used to purchase conclave memorabilia and other items in the section trading post. As most sections have a reasonably accurate idea of expected attendance based on tradition, this idea still provides incentive for lodges to fulfill their pre-registration to earn those trading post credits for their membership. Plus, it's a win-win for the section, as more money is often spent in the trading post as a result.

How many participants usually attend conclave? What is the ratio of youth to adult?

As expected, conclave attendance varies greatly, primarily in relation to the section's geographic size along with the number of and size of the lodges within that geographic area. Most sections averaged 300 - 400 participants, with an youth:adult ratio that ranged from 3:1 to 1:1.

Given that lodges with the farthest distance to travel often are the least well represented, one idea is to provide a travel incentive based on the distance from their council office to the conclave location. This incentive can be in the form of a registration fee rebate to lodges, calculated based on the travel distance and the ratio of youth to adult, where a larger rebate is given to lodges who have a higher youth:adult ratio. This rewards lodges who are actively trying to recruit youth to conclave, and helps pay the transportation/gas costs for lodges that are transporting the most youth the farthest to attend.

How do you handle non-registered walk-ins? How many walk-ins do you usually have?

Most sections discourage walk-ins (delegates with no pre-registration who register on-site), but allow them with the increased fee, while a few prohibit them completely. Generally, walk-ins number less than 10 for most sections.

With these responses came the topic of on-line registration, which is increasing in popularity. Several mentioned the product “SectionMaster” (www.sectionmaster.org) as their software utility, which allows on-line registration, payment, trading post transactions, as well as on-line training session registration. One section credited SectionMaster for a 30% increase in attendance in their first year of using it.

Other sections have developed their own registration system through a conclave portal on their section website, allowing similar selections and transactions as SectionMaster. In addition, sections are using web registration to offer direct email communication to the registered delegates, as well as providing direct feedback on registration status among lodges.

Location and Preparation

Where is your conclave usually held? If at a place other than a council camp, why do you think this works better for your section?

Most sections prefer meeting at a council camp, which fits well with the rotation schedule for the service lodge. This allows the service lodge to showcase its camp, and usually prompts the service lodge to make necessary camp improvements or upgrades to prepare for the number of participants, which benefits the camp for years to come.

How is the conclave staffed? What role does the service council play in staffing the conclave? What role do the section officers play in staffing the conclave?

“The council of chiefs shall meet no more than four times prior to the annual conclave to plan the program and divide responsibilities for its execution among member councils.” FOG pg. 20

“All councils shall share the responsibilities of all phases of the section program and administration. The council of chiefs shall host the conclave.”

Rule V - Responsibilities for the conclave program and administration, FOG pg. 22

Two models of division of responsibilities are currently in use among our sections:

- A “Conference Committee” model, where the section officers appoint youth committee chairmen to oversee a specific portion of the conclave program, e.g. training.

and

- A “Responsibility by Lodge” model, where elements of the conclave program are divided among the lodges within the section, e.g., one lodge is assigned training, another is assigned ceremonies events, etc.

Using the rules of the FOG as a guide, section leadership should continually evaluate the talents of the lodges in their section, in order to determine which model will most effectively achieve the purpose of conclave.

Do you use a special “theme” for your conclave? If so, can you provide an example or two of the most successful or unique?

Most sections use a written theme for their conclave, but few actually integrate it into their overall weekend program. Inspirational themes are the most common, utilizing phrases from the pre-Ordeal ceremony, or introspective questions such as “Where Is Your Journey Taking you”, or “What Is Your Legacy?”.

Other sections are utilizing a theme which allows them to build an entertaining program around, and involve lodges in the process. “The League of Extraordinary Arrowmen”, “Back to the Future”, “How Uncas Got His Groove Back”, and “Seeking a Lofty Summit Above” (an acronym for SALSA, providing for a southwestern theme) are interesting examples of themes that can be used to challenge lodges to bring their own interpretation of the theme to the conclave. This can help with conclave promotion within lodges, giving them something to work on and rally around, and can make for interesting “spirit award” competition at conclave.

Whichever type of theme is used, it is important to emphasize it in the program offerings as much as possible, not only in the shows, but also in conclave newsletters, awards presentations, and perhaps even at mealtimes. In sections that assemble prior to meals,

one example of this would be to do a 5 minute skit, acting out a memorable part of the pre-ordeal ceremony that incorporates the theme.

What memorabilia do you usually offer? What sells well, and what doesn't?

The selection of memorabilia occupies a significant amount of time in the planning of conclave. No surprise here, as a council of chiefs wants to avoid putting out a “loser” patch to the youth in their section. Generally, the patch becomes the “symbol” of that conclave, and is used on correspondence, newsletters, signs, etc.

Typical offerings include the basic pocket patches, jacket patches, and neckerchiefs. Other traditional items, such as coffee mugs and pins, are starting to fall off the list, as most Scouts and Scouters have little interest in purchasing and collecting these anymore. T-shirts sell better than expected; in fact, a couple of sections remarked that they bring in an outside vendor to do their shirts on-site. This eliminates the hassles of pre-orders, size discrepancies, and leftover inventory, and allows the delegate to personalize his shirt - a vendor can print the lodge name, or staff, on the shirt under the logo or on the sleeve.

Sections are also turning to section-branded merchandise as a source of supplemental income. Many sections have their own logo, which can be embroidered on baseball caps, fleece vests, messenger bags, toboggan caps, etc. Better choices on what to offer seem to be focused on what delegates will use, as opposed to what they will put in a drawer when they return home, like neckerchiefs and pins.

To be as efficient as possible in ordering, most sections require pre-orders of all conclave merchandise, particularly on items such as neckerchiefs, which are expensive and will have limited appeal. These pre-orders are usually handled through the lodges, i.e., individual delegate pre-orders are sent to their lodge, and the lodge tallies the orders and places their total order with the section. Distribution of the pre-ordered memorabilia is usually left to the lodge, and can be time-consuming in a tight weekend schedule. For this reason, one section offers to pack and ship each lodge's pre-order to them 10 - 14 days prior to conclave, which allows them time to sort and bag the pre-orders before arrival. For a large lodge, this can be a real time savings.

While most sections order extra merchandise to stock the trading post, a few sections handle all sales as pre-orders, allowing the lodges to order extras of items that they think might sell well in their lodge. This eliminates the concern of section inventory, and allows the lodge to sell extra merchandise back home throughout the year.

For those that have a trading post, getting the word out on what's available is always a challenge. One section creates a “catalog page” of trading post offerings, complete with pictures/prices, and includes it in the registration packet. Another idea is to place these “advertisements” in the Saturday morning conclave newsletter, or even in bathroom stalls!

If you could change your usual conclave agenda, how would you change it, and why?

Answers to this question provided interesting insight - and improvement opportunities - into the overall conclave experience from the advisers' point of view. Here are some examples:

"The two typical kinks are not enough hours in the weekend and meals taking longer than expected."

"It would be interesting to come up with a new idea or concept that could energize the conclave experience for those of us who have been working on conclaves for years..."

"I would slow things down..."

"If I could have more time in the afternoon between lunch and dinner, it would be great. Training is the reason to run the conclave, but the fellowship shared during the Saturday afternoon activities is why people come back the following year."

"I'd add more hours to the days and more days to the weekend to allow for all of the great programs to take place so that each delegate could participate to their respective ability. Failing that, I think a more established training program could only better our already great conclaves."

"Have it start on a Thursday night, end on Sunday, to allow more time for fellowship and training opportunities."

"Have more fun!!!! More youth would want to attend!"

"Add more workshops during the morning training, and special workshops during the afternoon activities."

"My perpetual problem is to make the event somewhat different (fresh) to prevent conclaves appearing as the same old thing."

It is clear from these replies that our section advisers are looking for innovation in conclave programming, and that they still view conclave as the best opportunity within the section program to inspire and motivate the Arrowmen in their section.

Part 2 - “Everything Else”

Hospitality

Who does the food service for your conclave? What role does the section have in the food service details? How are individual special needs considered?

It has been said that “an army runs on its stomach” and that statement is no truer than at a conclave. The food service can make or break a conclave, and therefore this should receive as much planning consideration as any other conclave item. Though still a responsibility of the council of chiefs, typically the service lodge handles food service as part of their duties, and therefore they should “work to impress, and exceed everyone’s expectations”.

Food quality, quantity, and variety, along with timeliness, are the important factors in conclave food service success. Serving spaghetti impresses no one, but offering spaghetti, along with another main entry as a choice, will exceed expectations. Likewise, keeping waiting lines to a minimum by increasing the number of serving lines, expanding the times for food service, and offering options for a meal like Saturday lunch (such as grilling hot dogs, hamburgers outside, along with fish & chips inside) can improve the efficiency and experience for all participants.

One example of a conclave food service success involved a service lodge who ran a 24 hour dining hall, offering food service round-the-clock. Participants were not tied to mealtimes as the primary schedule focus, and therefore could eat when they wanted, allowing them to pay more attention to the program events rather than when the next meal was. Not only did this eliminate the long lines at traditional mealtimes, it created the impression that there was more time to experience what conclave had to offer - instead of a cumulative 90 minutes wasted throughout the weekend waiting in a line, delegates could eat when their own schedule allowed it without cutting short or missing events that interested them. Talk about a service lodge home run!

At the least, Friday night food service should be considered flexible, given the variability in arrival times of the delegates. Some sections prepare box dinners, and have them ready to deliver to the campsite on arrival, while others prepare sandwiches, etc. and keep the dining hall open the entire evening on Friday as a welcome center.

Another section tries to work a theme into each meal, e.g. an Italian Bistro, with music, waiters, and other ideas to make each meal special and fun. That’s one way to make that spaghetti meal more interesting!

A dinner incorporating the conclave theme works to help tie the weekend together, and is made more impressive if the section leadership serves the meal. Or, creating an ongoing game like “Section Survivor” (a fun, spirit game where a lodge would get “voted off” a

mythical section island at each meal based on spirit at that meal) can make meals a vital part of the entertainment factor for conclave.

One other interesting idea is a fellowship feast, where each lodge brings something to the meal. While a meal like this might be difficult in larger sections, this idea might work well for a Saturday night cracker barrel, where each lodge would have time on Saturday to prepare something unique to bring to the event and share with others.

What unique services re: hospitality does the service council traditionally do for your conclave?

Traditionally, the service lodge plays an integral role in the hospitality aspect of conclave. From welcoming the participants, to creating an environment that promotes fellowship, to feeding them, the service lodge has an important opportunity to showcase their talents in hospitality, which serves to create a sense of pride among service lodge members.

“Work to Impress, and Exceed Everyone’s Expectations” should be the theme for the service lodge for the conclave weekend. The service lodge should evaluate the conclave experience from the perspective of Arrowmen from another lodge, from the moment they arrive, to the time they leave... “put yourself in their shoes.” Take the time to consider how their experience can be made easier and better, and exceed their expectations... that’s the stuff that brotherhood is made from!

As an example, let’s consider some typical visiting delegate expectations and how service lodge hospitality can exceed those expectations:

On arrival, visiting delegates are thinking the following:

Where do I go to park, and how far from my campsite will that be?
How do I get my stuff to my campsite?
I’m hungry, where can I get something to eat?

Let’s take those expectations and provide a way to impress them with hospitality! Here are some specific suggestions:

- Rather than parking everyone in the same large lot, if possible, identify small parking areas that are close to campsites, such that delegates can be close to their belongings if at all possible.
- Assign a corps of service lodge members to assist visiting delegates in unloading and moving their gear to their campsite. Try to avoid hauling visiting delegates’ belongings in a trailer and dropping them off... again, most participants do not like being separated from their belongings, for fear of losing or damaging personal belongings, as well as not having them available immediately to set up.

- Deliver a box dinner to the visitor’s campsite while they are setting up, and have coolers of water and powered drink available for them, which are refreshed throughout the weekend.
- Place a poster board size schedule in each campsite for easy reference.
- Deliver coffee, hot chocolate, and conclave newspapers to each campsite each morning.
- Provide a “goodie bag” of useful items for the weekend to each delegate – pens, penlight, band-aids, snacks, etc.
- Create a high-profile “Information Booth” or service lodge office, staffed round-the-clock.
- Include a “rain agenda” in the registration packet, which clearly outlines the pre-planned changes in the schedule for inclement weather.

Again, the service lodge should put itself in the place of the visiting delegate at every step of their experience, identifying and creatively accomplishing ways to “exceed everyone’s expectations”. This hospitality creates service lodge pride which is sure to be remembered for years to come.

Recreational Activities

What competitions do you traditionally offer? Are these lodge vs. lodge, or individual competitions? Is there an overall “champion”? Do you have a name for this event, eg. “Quest for the Golden Arrow”, etc.?

Recreational activities are among the most memorable of the conclave experience, and sections are always looking for new, entertaining and exciting activities that will involve and engage youth members in friendly competitions. Two formats surfaced on how sections typically offer these competitions:

1. An “Overall Champion” format – where a lodge is crowned the overall champion, by assembling and entering a team for each event in the overall competition,
and
2. An “Individual Competitions” format – where a section sets a series of events, and individuals (or groups) are free to enter any and all competitions, and multiple winners are crowned.

Sections that use the “Overall Champion” format generally have a traveling trophy for this, awarded to the lodge who achieves the highest overall score after combining the scores for all the events. While this format can be a unity builder within a lodge, some see this as unfair, believing that the larger lodges always carry the advantage in this format. To achieve a more level playing field, sections that use this format are encouraged to choose events that minimize the perceived advantage differences between large and small lodges.

The “Individual Competitions” format seems to be the more utilized among our sections. Proponents of this believe it provides for more interaction among all the youth, as individuals can make the choice to enter and compete, rather than lodges choosing their “A team” to compete and represent their lodge. Plus, more winners are recognized, giving each lodge a high probability of winning something.

One novel idea involves a team competition where each lodge supplied at least one of the members of the team. Each team then went to a series of stations that tested their outdoor, Scouting, or physical teamwork skills. The champion team was recognized and given an award, and a picture of each team was made on completing the competition and posted in the dining hall, which was a fun memory to review at the evening cracker barrel.

Here are a few interesting competitions that our sections are offering:

- The Pre-school Triathlon
- Chicken Bowling (using a frozen chicken to knock down 2 liter soda bottles)
- Tricycle Jousting
- Box Volleyball (using a box instead of a volleyball)
- Extreme Croquet
- Tomahawk Throwing
- Waterless Canoe Racing
- Cardboard Canoe Races (yes, in water!)
- Culinary Delight
- OA Fear Factor

Regardless of the format or events, to maximize the experience for all conclave delegates, consider events that invite participation across all levels of abilities.

Do you believe these competition events promote the purpose of conclave? Why or why not? What would you change, and why?

While most sections agreed that competitions were generally beneficial to their conclave, others brought out some interesting comments regarding the potentially harmful aspects of being overly competitive between lodges. In fact, some sections have abandoned lodge team vs. lodge team competitions (basketball, wischixin, soccer, flickerball, etc.), as they have occasionally created animosity among lodges.

Sections are replacing these competitions with events that are scored by “best time” to determine the outcome. Other sections are changing their team competitions from lodge-on-lodge into teams that contain members from different lodges, in an effort to create more opportunities for fellowship and team-building among the delegates. This also may encourage a youth member to return the following year, to see his old “teammates”!

Do you offer any non-competition recreational activities?

The successful conclave is a fun conclave for all, and not all recreational activities need to be competitive to be enjoyed. Among the events offered, be sure to include fun events that invite delegates to join in and take part, regardless of their age. Volleyball and horseshoes are good examples, and outdoor skills events can be easily arranged to encourage involvement by all.

Several sections consider their patch auction in this category, using it not only as a fund-raising opportunity, but also for entertainment value. When done live, it gains the most entertainment value over a meal, such as the Saturday evening meal. A silent auction is also a common offering, running all day and providing those inclined with something to follow throughout the day.

One section creates a midway for Cub Scouts, inviting local Cubs to enjoy select recreational activities offered by the lodges, in which Arrowmen can also participate.

Do you offer any adult recreational activities?

When discussing recreational competitions, most sections take the stance that these competitions are for youth only. While many adults are content to be spectators, sections should consider providing events that foster interaction between adults from different lodges as well. Consider events that adults might enjoy, or that would create conversation and fellowship. Some ideas here include:

- A Chili cook-off competition
- Coffee cup competition - creating a coffee cup with clay, play-dough, etc.
- Totem pole carving - giving each lodge an uncarved section of a totem pole prior to conclave, and have them finish it during a lodge event (to promote conclave awareness/registration), then bring it to conclave and finish/assemble it at conclave, as a lasting remembrance of the event.
- “Do-it-yourself” golf - adults create their own clubs and use a plastic golf ball to play a short round of golf.
- Shooting sports – friendly competitions using the available camp offerings.

Administrative Competitions

What competitions do you traditionally offer? How are these judged? What awards are given?

Administrative competitions usually include lodge publications, such as the newsletter, planbook, website, and “Where to Go Camping Guide”. These competitions create incentive for lodges to create publications that they will be proud of in comparison to other lodges, and provide opportunity to learn of ideas that other lodges use to improve their publications and communication tools.

Other conclave competitions that are worthwhile include a camping promotion booth and unit visitation competition. One section is considering adding competitions such as “Best Cub Camping Event” and “Service to the Council” to help focus on the current strategic plan initiatives.

Recognition is typically done for each event, although some sections award an overall winner - “best all-around” - based on these events, as well as some other yearly parameters or goals/expectations.

Ceremonies Competitions

Which ceremonies competitions do you offer? How do you recognize teams and individuals?

Historically, ceremonies are among the most traditional of conclave events, providing an opportunity for delegates to learn more effective ceremonialist techniques from others who demonstrate their best ceremony. Surprisingly, a large number of sections do not offer ceremonies competitions, stating that there has not been enough interest or participation to justify it.

Those that offer competitions usually do the pre-Ordeal ceremony, although others offer the full compliment, and judging and recognition is done based on the current NOAC standards. A few sections offer 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place team and individual awards for best “principal”.

To increase participation and move toward team competitions, one section is now offering evaluations of any members of a team that are in attendance. They report that interest has steadily increased with this approach, such that they are hoping to offer team competitions soon.

Whatever the approach, an opportunity for delegates to view and be evaluated in ceremonies can only serve to strengthen the OA program in the home lodge, and therefore should be strongly considered as a key element to the success of a conclave.

American Indian Events

What competitive events do you offer? How do you recognize teams and individuals?

American Indian events add to the pageantry of conclave, providing an opportunity for others to develop an interest in this, thereby enhancing the overall conclave experience. Sections who are strong in American Indian events typically offer individual competitions in traditional dance disciplines (fancy, grass, old style, etc.), as well as a team competition, provided enough teams are available to compete. In addition, as an essential extension, drum and sing competitions are becoming more popular, as lodges become more exposed to this.

Again, many sections struggle with participation in this area, hampering their ability to offer this as part of their overall conclave experience. One idea to increase participation without competition involves having a pow-wow in the afternoon as a part of the Cub Scout “midway”, inviting delegates to participate without worrying about competing, which is a less intimidating way to encourage participation and expose others to the experience. Others have invited dance teams and individuals from lodges in nearby sections to hold workshops and participate in these pow-wows, hoping to increase interest and work toward developing their own programs.

Other Program Events

What do you do for evening gatherings?

Evening gatherings offer an important opportunity to enhance the conclave experience among all delegates, and should be carefully considered to provide a mix of fun, interaction, information, and inspiration. To properly set the tone for the weekend, a Friday night opening show is a must, introducing all the available opportunities for each delegate. A few sections do this by preparing an amusing, memorable video advertisement of each program area, using the youth chairman of that program area as the “front man” to encourage participation in his area. This can turn into somewhat of a competition itself, as delegates enjoy seeing who can outdo who in creating a memorable promotion of their program area. Whatever the agenda, this opening gathering of

delegates should be tall on fun and spirit, giving both old and new conclave participants a sense of anticipation toward the rest of the weekend.

The Saturday evening show proves to be more inspirational, as sections create a memorable show that incorporates the weekend theme, interspersed with spirit competitions between lodges, and some conclave awards recognitions. With the technology available, the use of prepared video is becoming more common, which offers a nice contrast to the live portions of the show. In fact, showing film clips of the dance or activities competitions while announcing the awards adds to the presentation, and provides another memory of the participant's experience with that event, while showing those who may have missed that event what they missed.

After the shows, the evening cracker barrels provide opportunities for furthering the unique fellowship experience of conclave through this customary offering. Ideas to enhance cracker barrels involve using a "festival" concept; here are some notable responses:

- Club Goodman - one section holds a nightclub-type after-show party, complete with music and a DJ, games, food, root beer floats, multi-person large screen video game contests, karaoke, etc.
- A themed carnival, utilizing one of the fun theme ideas, with each lodge contributing to the carnival in the form of food, games, and other high-energy interactive contests. With a southwestern theme, one section made piñatas of each of the lodge totems in the section. Others have used games such as "OA Hollywood Squares", section officer pie-eating (or pie-throwing) contests, "Name That Tune", etc. to promote a carnival atmosphere.

Fellowship Events:

What do you do to promote interaction between conclave participants?

One of the most overlooked opportunities at a conclave involves the chance to meet and get to know brothers from other lodges. Friendships made at a conclave can add remarkably to the overall experience for the first-time conclave delegate, and can help foster the true sense of brotherhood within our organization. Although the conclave schedule is tight on time, look for opportunities to promote one-on-one interaction among conclave delegates.

One of the best times to promote interaction is on Friday, between the time the delegates arrive and the opening show. After delegates have settled in, they are looking for something to do, and a wide game of some type can get them out and in the conclave spirit. Wide game trading puzzles are one easy way to accomplish this, as are "signature

collections”, where delegates are asked to obtain signatures and information toward completion of a participation award card.

Another idea takes the wide game concept one step further... in his registration packet, each delegate receives one puzzle card which is marked with a number, and he searches for delegates from other lodges to complete the puzzle set. When the set is completed, the group (made up of members of all lodges represented) takes the completed puzzle to the dining hall or trading post to see if one of the puzzle card numbers matches a pre-selected list of winning numbers. If so, that group receives a prize... a free ice cream sandwich or something to immediately celebrate their accomplishment. The idea here is to select numbers such that everyone is a winner by completing the game.

A Friday scavenger hunt is another good way to accomplish this, and if designed correctly, can also be helpful by introducing and orienting the delegates to the host camp.

What activity(s) offered at your conclave adds to the value of the overall program, and why?

Most replies agreed that the most value-added activities were the recreational competitions, followed by the “Brotherhood Bash”-type after-show carnivals, as they helped bring out the spirit of brotherhood and fellowship at conclave.

Other answers included the following:

- ICE competitions – These are invaluable in providing quality feedback to enable our lodges to develop and improve their induction ceremonies. Membership retention starts the second candidates walk into their Ordeal and ceremonies play a large role in that.
- Shows – A well-written theme show, with a good mix of fun, interaction, and inspiration, is a real credit to the overall experience. Conclave shows can deliver an important message in a very entertaining way, and provide a great stage for proper recognition of lodge and section accomplishments, as well as a forum for lodge spirit.
- Training – No conclave would be complete without top-notch training. This essential piece provides delegates with a solid opportunity to grow as key contributors in their home lodges and councils.

Is there any other unique and successful conclave activity that you would like to share with us?

Here are the items that our section advisers believe to be their most successful, perhaps based on the impact these events have had on the overall experience:

- "...the best thing we've ever done was have our Vigil delegates serve dinner to all the other delegates last year, using family-style dining hall service."
- "Our best conclave involved a conclave-wide service project..."
- "Our New Arrowman luncheon, where we honor those members who were inducted since our last conclave. We believe it helps significantly in retention of active Arrowman status."

One additional idea here is to give each new Arrowman at the luncheon a special plastic wristband, which if worn on return to next year's conclave, earns them special recognition in some form.

- "The addition of Cub Scout participation to selected afternoon recreational events and the pow-wow..."
- "We are now offering suggested "tracks" based on an Arrowman's conclave experience... at the heart of this is a checklist of suggested training and "don't miss" offerings that a first-time conclave participant should experience. We believe this increases a new Arrowman's exposure to the overall program, and thereby improves the chance that he will remain active in Scouting and the OA."
- "Our post-conclave evaluation - via email, each year we provide a survey to a cross-section of participants, ranging from new Arrowmen to seasoned conclave veterans, providing us useful feedback to use in improving our conclave program year-to-year."

Yours to Use...

Section conclave is a unique, annual opportunity to inspire and motivate Arrowmen, equipping them for more effective service to their unit, lodge, and council. The experience that each delegate has at conclave can have a significant impact on multiple levels, from personal dedication to lodge and council program success. Therefore, evaluating and improving the conclave experience for each Arrowman will result in a more successful section, as the section improves its effectiveness in carrying out its purpose.

So, how do we use this information to provide a more meaningful experience to our section's membership? To begin, we must evaluate each element of our conclave program against the stated purposes for sections to hold a conclave.

Does our conclave effectively:

- provide a structure for leadership skill development and organizational planning for our lodge and section youth leadership,
- foster lodge and council program enhancement through shared learning,
- expose our members to ideas that will enhance their retention as active Arrowmen and Scouts, and
- solidify our heritage of brotherhood through fellowship and renewing of friendships?

Improving the conclave program elements with these objectives in mind will serve to enhance each section's success in delivering the proper experience to their Arrowmen. As a result, those Arrowmen will be better prepared to do their part in supporting the mission and purpose of the Order of the Arrow within their councils.

Yes, conclave *is* an experience... one that we hope will continue to motivate and inspire Arrowmen toward greater service for years to come.