

Implementing Slack for the Middle Tennessee Council Commissioner Corps

Doctor of Commissioner Science Project

By Eric Strickland

November 10, 2025

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Introduction	4
Literature Review	5
Methodology.....	6
Implementation and Rollout	7
Results and Findings.....	8
Other Learnings.....	10
Discussion	11
Recommendations	12
Conclusion	13
References (APA 7th ed.)	14
Appendix A: Original Project Proposal.....	15
Appendix B: Survey Data Summary	18
Appendix C: Raw Survey Data	19

Abstract

This Doctor of Commissioner Science (DCS) project explores the design, implementation, and outcomes of adopting Slack as the primary communication and collaboration tool for the Middle Tennessee Council (MTC) commissioner corps. The project aimed to modernize internal communications, improve team cohesion, and ensure continuity across volunteer leadership transitions.

A structured implementation approach was used, incorporating a needs assessment, pilot testing, phased rollout, and pre/post implementation surveys. The results demonstrated a significant improvement in information flow to unit commissioners with smaller improvements around role clarity and connectedness among commissioners. The adoption of Slack created a centralized and transparent communication hub that improved efficiency and accountability, laying the groundwork for sustainable organizational continuity within the commissioner corps.

Introduction

Commissioners are the connective tissue of Scouting America’s local structure. They are the trusted advisors, servant leaders, and mentors who help units thrive. Yet the commissioner corps faces an ongoing challenge: how to maintain consistent communication across multiple districts, scores of volunteers, and constantly changing unit, district and council leadership teams.

Historically, communication relied on email threads, text chains, and periodic in-person meetings. This decentralized approach limited transparency, delayed collaboration, and hindered new volunteers from quickly integrating. The objective of this project was to introduce Slack, a digital collaboration platform widely used by nonprofits and enterprises, to the Middle Tennessee Council (MTC) commissioner corps.

By leveraging Slack’s capabilities, the project sought to create a unified, searchable communication system that supports collaboration, fosters transparency, and sustains continuity across commissioner transitions.

Literature Review

The literature on communication technology in volunteer and nonprofit organizations highlights a recurring theme: effective communication is directly correlated with engagement and retention.

According to Nonprofit Tech for Good (2023), organizations that adopt structured digital communication tools see marked increases in retention and satisfaction. Harvard Business Review (2022) discusses how collaboration platforms can transform team performance, increasing innovation and decision speed.

Scouting America (2023) provides foundational guidance for commissioners, emphasizing consistent contact and communication as key to effective unit support. Similarly, the AmeriCorps/ICF (2024) Volunteer Management Literature Review reinforces that transparent communication systems correlate strongly with volunteer retention and satisfaction.

Slack, as a platform, has proven especially adaptable to distributed organizations. Studies of Slack's nonprofit use (Slack for Nonprofits, 2024) show it increases visibility, transparency, and access to resources while reducing dependency on hierarchical email structures. For MTC, this project tested those principles within the context of unit service.

Methodology

This project followed a five-phase structure consistent with project management and DCS research standards:

1. **Needs Assessment & Stakeholder Engagement** – Surveys and interviews were conducted among assistant council commissioners (ACCs), district commissioners (DCs), roundtable commissioners (RTCs), and unit commissioners (UCs) to identify existing communication challenges and desired outcomes.
2. **Workspace Setup** – The MTC commissioner corps Slack workspace was configured with dedicated channels for districts, specialty teams, events, and leadership groups.
3. **Pilot Program** – A small pilot team of 12 commissioners tested Slack over a 4-week period to identify usability barriers and gather feedback.
4. **Training & Rollout** – A hybrid onboarding model was developed, including virtual training, one-on-one mentorship, and simple video guides.
5. **Post-Implementation Evaluation** – Surveys mirrored the pre-assessment, measuring changes across role understanding, role confidence, connectedness, communication flow, and satisfaction.

The surveys employed a 5-point Likert scale and captured both quantitative and qualitative feedback. Data were analyzed using comparative percentage changes and descriptive statistics.

Implementation and Rollout

The MTC Slack workspace was developed under the council’s non-profit license, ensuring no financial burden to the organization. The setup included core channels for council-wide communication and specific channels for each district.

To accommodate volunteers with varying technical proficiency, onboarding included personal coaching sessions and asynchronous resources. Each district was encouraged to identify a “Slack Champion” to support local adoption.

During the pilot, commissioners appreciated Slack’s ability to separate discussions into topic-specific channels and to share documents instantly. Challenges included initial hesitation among less tech-comfortable volunteers and smartphone notification management. These were mitigated through hands-on demonstrations and positive reinforcement from leadership.

Following successful pilot feedback, Slack was rolled out council-wide, onboarding over 70 users in the first month.

Results and Findings

Survey responses indicated significant improvement in the key domain of information flow to unit commissioners with less significant changes in role clarity, role confidence and connectedness. This is potentially impacted by the shift in the experience level of the respondents between the pre and post surveys (see figure 2). Information flow from unit commissioners to the council commissioner team also showed a small improvement.

- **Understanding of Role: +1.8%**
- **Confidence in Role: -2.9%**
- **Connectedness to District Team: +3.0%**
- **Connectedness to Council Team: -0.3%**
- **Perceived Effectiveness of Communication Flow:**
 - **To Unit Commissioners +15.9%**
 - **From Unit Commissioners +0.5%**
- **Overall Satisfaction with Slack Workspace: 3.6/5 average (post survey only)**

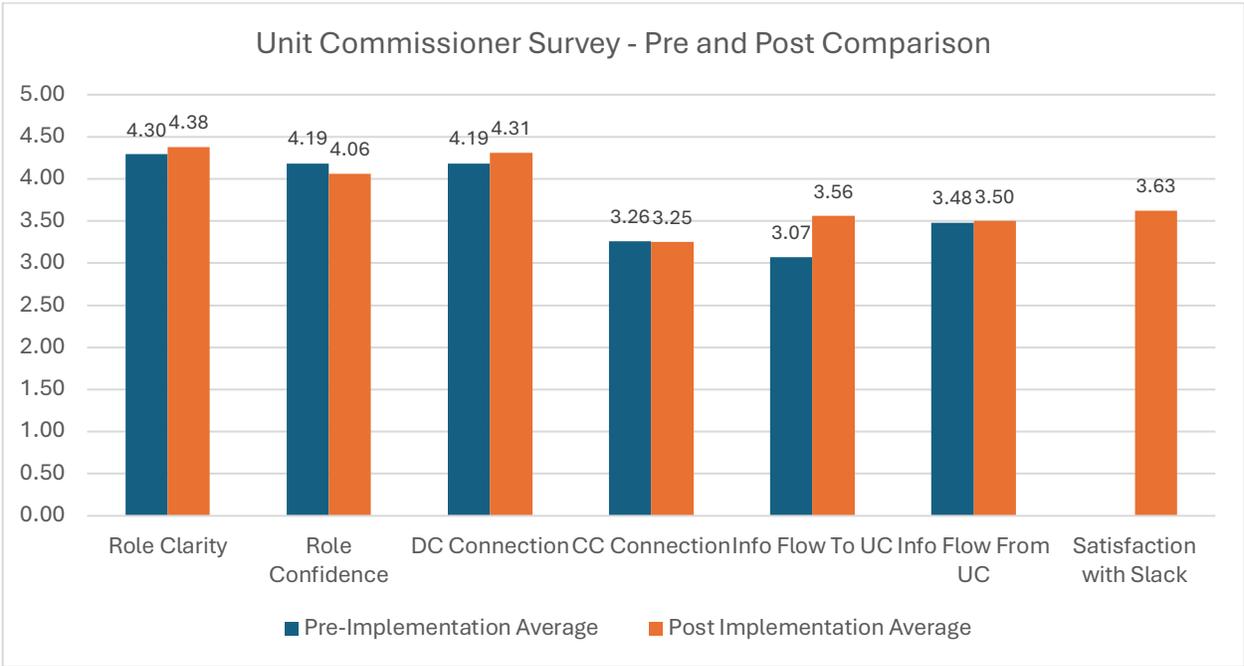


Figure 1. Pre- and Post-Implementation Comparison of Key Communication Metrics

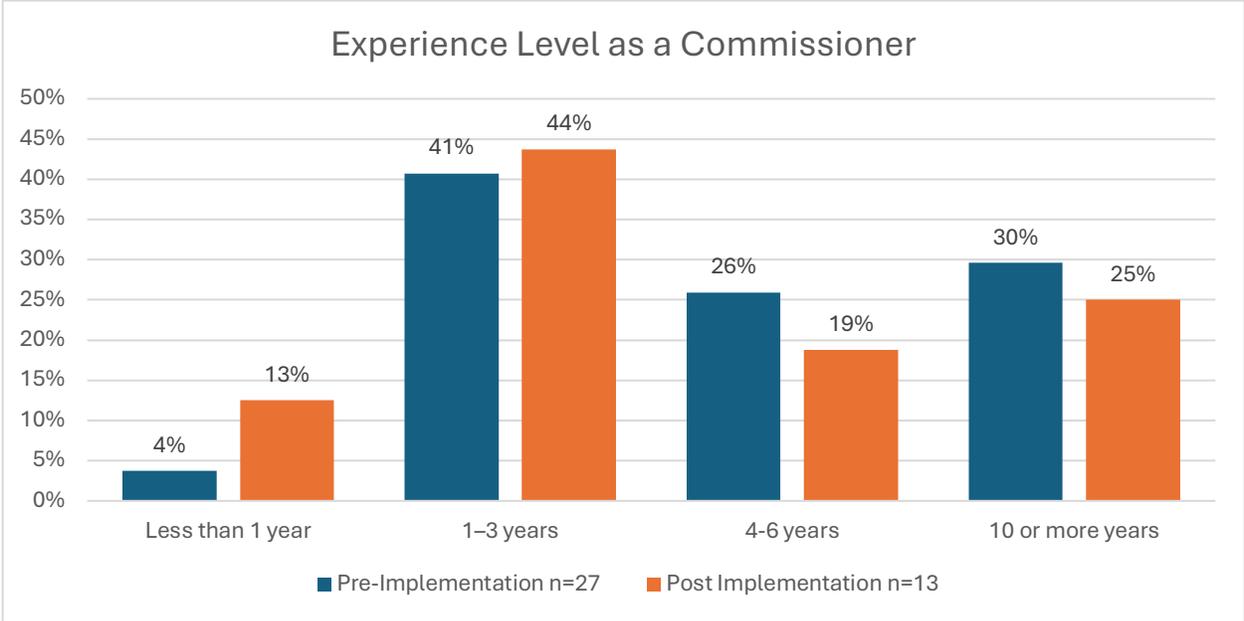


Figure 2. Respondents Experience Level as a Commissioner

In the qualitative feedback specific to the Slack implementation, most respondents cite the tool as useful, user friendly and a good way to share information. Additionally, a few respondents recommend additional ongoing training while one respondent dislikes the tool.

Other Learnings

Commissioners are very experienced scouters. On average, across the pre and post implementation surveys, over 80% of commissioners have five or more years of scouting experience with 45% having 20 or more years. Fifty-five percent of respondents had scouting experience during their youth.

Survey respondents provided robust feedback in the qualitative responses that highlighted several additional areas for potential improvement:

- More opportunities for all commissioners to be together, either in-person or virtually.
- Less scheduled time at in-person gatherings to allow for fellowship and information sharing.
- More in-person training opportunities for commissioners.
- Mentorship program for new commissioners.

From this feedback, the council commissioner team has already acted on some of these areas. In October, we hosted our first in-person commissioner summit at Latimer Scout Reservation. This included time for training and collaboration for participants, goal review and setting exercises, a training themed campfire program and ample time for informal connection among the participants.

Further, we have revamped the annual commissioner meeting schedule to include a mix of in-person and hybrid meetings of the commissioner cabinet and additional opportunities for all commissioners to gather throughout the course of the scouting year. We also intend to offer an in-person position specific training option for new commissioners at our College of Commissioner Science next winter.

A formal mentorship program could become a future project for a DCS candidate.

Discussion

The positive outcomes observed in the MTC Slack rollout align with broader research findings. Studies by Harvard Business Review (2022) and AmeriCorps/ICF (2024) indicate that clear digital collaboration structures reduce duplication of effort and improve volunteer efficiency. A 2023 Forrester Consulting study found that Slack produced a 294% return on investment among service teams, largely through faster collaboration and reduced response times (Forrester Consulting, 2023).

Slack’s “Future of Work” research (2023) reported that 88% of users felt more connected to their teams, and 80% said they experienced greater transparency in projects. These outcomes parallel the early improvements observed in the survey data, particularly in the areas of connectedness and information flow.

At the same time, the Predictive Index (2022) cautioned that without clear usage norms, Slack can create “communication noise” and overload users. To address this risk, the council commissioner team should establish clear Slack etiquette guidelines, such as limiting redundant channels, encouraging threaded discussions, and setting “quiet hours” for non-urgent communication. These steps will ensure Slack remains a tool for productivity, not distraction.

Recommendations

1. **Maintain Blended Communication:**

Combine digital communication on Slack with quarterly in-person or hybrid all commissioner meetings/gatherings to sustain engagement and relationship-building.

2. **Expand Slack Champions:**

This project contemplated a “Slack Champion” for each district, an experienced Slack user that can guide new commissioners, ensuring consistent support for all volunteers. Council commissioner leadership should formalize this effort to include a group of champions that can support all districts including the appointment of an overall “Slack Champion” for the commissioner corps, not necessarily from the CC leadership team.

3. **Monitor Engagement and Satisfaction:**

Conduct follow-up surveys annually to evaluate adoption, satisfaction, and areas for improvement. These surveys can be expanded to measure additional areas as needed from time to time. The council commissioner team, with advice from the Slack champion, should implement the surveys.

4. **Streamline Channels and Governance:**

The Slack champion, in consultation with the CC leadership team, should regularly review channel structure and permissions to prevent clutter and confusion as membership evolves.

5. **Encourage Leadership Presence:**

The council commissioner team should continue modeling active engagement in Slack to set expectations and encourage participation.

Conclusion

Implementing Slack for the Middle Tennessee Council commissioner corps achieved its primary objectives: improving communication, collaboration, and continuity. The platform unified the council’s commissioner corps under one digital roof, improved accessibility, and established a replicable model for other councils nationwide.

More broadly, the project affirmed that technology adoption in volunteer organizations must be purpose-driven, people-first, and process-supported. The Slack initiative exemplified that balance—empowering commissioners to connect, collaborate, and serve more effectively.

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Appendix A: Original Project Proposal

Eric Strickland

Doctor of Commissioner Science Project Proposal: Implementing Slack for the Middle TN Council Commissioner Corps

Objective: The goal of this project is to **Implement Slack** as the primary communication and collaboration tool for the Middle Tennessee Council (MTC) commissioner corps, improving internal communications and team collaboration.

Key Features & Benefits

- 1. Centralized Communication:**
Slack will replace fragmented communication methods, providing a unified space for messaging, file sharing, and team discussions.
 - 2. Organized Channels:**
Slack will allow creation of specific channels for different teams, committees, projects, or events, ensuring streamlined communication across the organization.
 - 3. Enhanced Collaboration:**
Slack integrates with a variety of tools like Google Drive and Google Calendar, supporting document and calendar sharing.
 - 4. Accessibility:**
With mobile and desktop apps, Slack will allow commissioners to stay connected anytime, from anywhere, promoting continuous collaboration.
 - 5. Increased Transparency:**
Slack's open communication model improves visibility into ongoing projects, events, and discussions, fostering a culture of transparency.
 - 6. Enhanced Continuity:**
As volunteer commissioner leadership changes over time, Slack will provide a central repository of communication history, resources, and decisions, helping new leaders quickly get up to speed and maintain continuity in ongoing initiatives.
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Implementation Plan

1. Needs Assessment & Stakeholder Engagement (2 weeks)

- Conduct interviews with key stakeholders (commissioners including a cross section of ACCs, DCs, RTCs and UCs and professional staff) to assess current communication needs, challenges, and desired outcomes for Slack implementation.
- Administer a pre-implementation survey to unit commissioners to establish baseline metrics across the following domains:
 - Understanding of their role as a unit commissioner.
 - Confidence in their role as a unit commissioner.
 - Connectedness to the district commissioner team.
 - Connectedness to the council commissioner team.
 - Perception of how effectively information flows:
 - From the council commissioner team to unit commissioners.
 - From unit commissioners to the council commissioner team.

2. Workspace Setup - Initial (2 weeks)

- Configure the MTC commissioner corps Slack workspace, including channel creation, user permissions, and integrations with existing tools (Google Drive, calendar systems, etc.).
- Work with MTC administrative staff to secure a free, non-profit professional license for Slack.

3. Pilot Program (2 – 4 weeks)

- Test Slack within a small group of commissioners to identify challenges and gather feedback for refinements before full rollout.

5. Workspace Setup - Final (1 week)

- Incorporate final configuration based on feedback from the Pilot Program.

6. Training & Onboarding (1 - 2 weeks)

- Provide virtual training sessions for commissioners and appropriate professional staff to ensure effective adoption of Slack, covering key features and best practices for communication and collaboration. Utilize multiple onboarding strategies to specifically address the needs of rural and/or technologically challenged or resistant volunteers that may include:
 - Offer one-on-one or small-group onboarding sessions to address individual needs.
 - Provide simple, step-by-step guides (written and/or video) for downloading, setting up, and using Slack.
 - Create a dedicated support channel in Slack for troubleshooting and answering questions.
 - Identify tech-savvy volunteers in each district who can serve as mentors for ongoing support.

7. Full Rollout (1 week)

- Deploy Slack to the entire commissioner corps.

8. Post-Implementation Assessment (2 weeks; 12 – 16 weeks after rollout)

- Re-administer the same survey from the pre-assessment phase to measure changes in the five domains. A 6th domain will be added specifically measuring user satisfaction with the MTC commissioner corps Slack workspace.
- Complete final project report for submission to DCS committee.

9. Ongoing Support & Evaluation (Ongoing)

- Monitor Slack usage to ensure smooth adoption, troubleshoot any issues, and collect feedback for future improvements.
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Timeline Summary:

- **Phase 1:** Needs assessment and initial Slack setup (4 weeks).
 - **Phase 2:** Pilot program and final Slack setup (3-5 weeks).
 - **Phase 3:** Training & onboarding and full rollout of Slack (2-3 weeks).
 - **Phase 4:** Post-implementation assessment (2 weeks; 12-16 weeks after rollout)
 - **Phase 5:** Ongoing support, monitoring, and evaluation (Ongoing).
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Success Metrics:

- Pre and post assessment results.
 - Increased user adoption rate and active participation in Slack channels.
 - Reduced email traffic and faster response times for internal communication.
 - Positive feedback on usability and collaboration features from commissioners and staff.
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By implementing Slack for internal communication, this project will enhance both operational efficiency and volunteer engagement, creating a more connected and informed commissioner corps.

Appendix B: Survey Data Summary

Domain	Pre-Implementation Avg	Post-Implementation Avg	Change
How clearly do you understand your role as a unit commissioner	4.30	4.38	+0.08
How confident are you in performing the role of unit commissioner	4.19	4.06	-0.12
How strong is your working relationship with your district commissioner	4.19	4.31	+0.13
How strong is your connection to the council commissioner team	3.26	3.25	-0.01
In your personal experience, how well does information flow from you, as a unit commissioner, to the council commissioner team	3.07	3.56	+0.49
In your personal experience, how well does information flow to you, as a unit commissioner, from the council commissioner team	3.48	3.50	+0.02

Appendix C: Raw Survey Data

See Following Pages

Middle TN Council - Unit Commissioner Pre-Survey

MTC Commissioner Corps Slack Implementation Project - Strickland

Timestamp	How many years have you worked in your commissioner role?	How many years of experience do you have as an adult leader in Scouting?	Were you in the MTC Scouting program as a youth?	How clearly do you understand your role as a commissioner?	How confident are you in performing the role of unit commissioner?	How strong is your working relationship with your district commissioner?	How strong is your connection to the council commissioner team?	In your personal experience, how well does the council commissioner support you as a unit commissioner?	In your personal experience, how well does the council commissioner support you as a unit commissioner?	Please provide feedback on ways that we can improve Two-Way Information How can we improve our communication with you as a unit commissioner?	Please provide feedback on ways that we can enhance our understanding and confidence for unit commissioners	Please provide feedback on ways that we can strengthen the connection between unit commissioners, district commissioners and the council commissioner team	Please provide feedback on any additional comments, concerns, or suggestions related to your role as a unit commissioner or commissioner service in general?	
12/8/2024 16:24:41	1-3 years	Less than 5 years	No	4	4	4	5	4	4	The best communication link between Unit Commissioners and the Council Commissioner is an engaged District Commissioner.	Having an Index of the National Handbook has been useful and I hope I can continue.	Encourage engaged District Commissioners and emphasize the importance of regular District Commissioner meetings.	Changes are coming at us quicker than they have in the past. I hope we can explain why the changes are happening. They can be hard to keep up with, and even harder to explain to our units.	
12/8/2024 16:26:12	10 or more years	20 years or more	Yes	5	5	5	5	4	4					
12/8/2024 16:29:41	Less than 1 year	Less than 5 years	Yes	5	4	1	1	1	1	For the new commissioners, have a meeting to introduce them so a working relationship can be established from the start and	Providing a periodic "Commissioner Corner" of sorts to answer a question or two to add more to someone's base of knowledge.	If there is a Slack channel, text thread, or other form of communication everyone can be part of to ensure visibility of each member and role.	I have been a commissioner for less than 2 months. I am very new in my role and am still learning the ropes. I hope to be able to help the leaders for get insights of information as I learn more.	
12/8/2024 16:46:58	4-6 years	20 years or more	Yes	5	5	5	4	2	4	Slack channel for all MTC commissioners	Role play using experienced commissioners to demonstrate how a meeting will should go	Maybe have some events / get together that are less formal than some of the meetings or training that we have. Sometimes being able to just talk about issues informally is the best.		
12/8/2024 17:09:43	4-6 years	5-10 years	No	5	5	5	5	5	5	Needs to be more able to communicate with the council commissioner team. We talk at events or Commissioner College, but not much interaction otherwise.	For my experience, it was so the other training look around on the site and go	Clearly all Commissioner events	None at this time.	
12/8/2024 17:11:22	4-6 years	20 years or more	Yes	4	4	5	3	3	3	Needs to be more able to communicate with the council commissioner team. We talk at events or Commissioner College, but not much interaction otherwise.	Maybe have more small group training / interaction during the year. We have some training at Commissioner College and all training is left to the Dist Commissioner.	Maybe have some events / get together that are less formal than some of the meetings or training that we have. Sometimes being able to just talk about issues informally is the best.		
12/8/2024 17:25:08	1-3 years	20 years or more	Yes	4	4	5	5	5	3	If there are council commissions should attend our month meeting or atleast quarterly.	For my experience, it was so the other training look around on the site and go	Clearly all Commissioner events	None at this time.	
12/8/2024 18:04:41	1-3 years	5-10 years	No	4	3	2	2	3	3	Offer more virtual options to participate in group meetings.	Include commissioner service classes at USJ.	Create gathers in coordination with council table events.	I've been working in commissioner service. However, look a step back when it became apparent that the feedback I provided as a responsible for was not valued. Why have assessments in the field conducting the their leadership year follow up or other assessments, getting to know the units and local faith in commissioner service and MTC so I shifted my time and energy back to the units my family is involved with.	
12/8/2024 18:17:25	1-3 years	Less than 5 years	No	4	4	5	5	5	5	I think time spent with council commissioner team and individual districts to observe more in person sessions and provide feedback with the teams.	Mentoring of new unit commissioners if necessary from other districts that have better success as commissioners) to give a better new as they start in their new position	Training or get to know you events to help cement relationships between the different groups.	I have early engaged leadership unit commissioner. I would have enjoyed more mentoring, but was in a nonfunctional district commissioner when I have been asked to learn as go and have enjoyed each would really love it if the units wanted to have us visit, but that is a uphill battle until they see we are here to serve them and not take on them.	
12/8/2024 18:34:29	4-6 years	5-10 years	No	4	4	4	2	2	2					
12/8/2024 18:46:30	10 or more years		No	5	5	5	4	4	4	We could have weekly updates by email or group text.	We can have frequent training sessions for updated information or changes in the evaluation process.	We could have frequent training sessions for updated information or changes in the evaluation process.	I think that the MTC has done a great job with the commissioner service and passing the baton to the next level. We need to keep up the good work.	
12/8/2024 18:52:44	1-3 years	Less than 5 years	Yes	5	5	5	3	4	4	In the few evaluations and meeting I've attended, the "how" of the process seems sufficient.	Training online and college seems sufficient.	Include unit and dist comm on more emails, possibly have more frequent training for council at eaching	Highlight positive comm stories from our council at eaching	
12/8/2024 21:57:24	10 or more years	20 years or more	No	5	3	5	3	1	1	Person handle in their office and duty handle in listening to those that they serve.	Provide the "how" of the process of reporting the unit commissioners and get on with the program.	Stop being elitist.		
12/8/2024 22:24:06	10 or more years	20 years or more	Yes	5	5	5	5	5	5	It is dependent upon the profile of the council commissioner who's good in the MTC.	Commissioner College is a big key.	Continuing emphasis on communication from all parties.	We have a strong MTC commissioner effort.	
12/8/2024 6:28:26	10 or more years	20 years or more	Yes	2	5	1	1	1	1					
12/8/2024 7:46:00	1-3 years	Less than 5 years	Yes	3	3	3	3	3	3					
12/8/2024 8:41:51	1-3 years	20 years or more	Yes	4	4	5	3	3	3	I am not sure who the council commissioner team members are.	Other than CCJCS we should have annual training for the districts.	Provide other opportunities to connect with members.		
12/8/2024 8:50:48	1-3 years	5-10 years	No	4	5	2	2	3	3					
12/8/2024 9:07:30	1-3 years	5-10 years	Yes	5	4	4	1	3	3					
12/8/2024 9:36:39	4-6 years	20 years or more	No	5	5	5	3	3	3	What information that you cover in those meetings comes through from the district commissioner usually, rather than an email that I can review.	Now that we have a district commissioner that actually checks in with us and shares information, there is a lot more good news. Finding district people that aren't as amazing, and ones that do not put their own "spin" on what they hear is helpful.	Commissioner university and personnel training.	All involved must be willing to dedicate time.	My experience was that the, scout leaders a unit commissioner served, that little to no working with the leaders on an event level were interested and cooperated. The role of the unit commissioner needs to be reinforced.
12/8/2024 10:29:44	1-3 years	20 years or more	Yes	4	4	4	4	3	3	The monthly meeting is a good to have information, email and personal calls.	Commissioner university and personnel training.	All involved must be willing to dedicate time.		

Middle TN Council - Unit Commissioner Pre-Survey
MTC Commissioner Corps Slack Implementation Project – Strickland

Timestamp	How many years have you served in any commissioner role?	How many years of total experience do you have as an adult leader in Scouting?	Were you involved in the Scouting program as a youth?	How clearly do you understand your role as a unit commissioner?	How confident are you in performing the duties of a unit commissioner?	How strong is your relationship with your district commissioner?	How strong is your connection to your commissioner team?	In your personal experience, how often do you hear information from you, as a unit commissioner, to the council?	In your personal experience, how often do you hear information from you, as a unit commissioner, to the council?	Please provide feedback on ways that we can improve two-way information flow between unit commissioners and the council.	Please provide feedback on ways that we can enhance role understanding and confidence for unit commissioners.	Please provide feedback on ways that we can strengthen the connection between unit commissioners and the council.	Please provide feedback on any additional comments, concerns, or suggestions related to unit commissioner service in general?
12/9/2024 20:47:37	10 or more years	20 years or more	Yes	5	5	3	3	2	3	Get the right active people in the right path to meet the needs of the population.	Mentorship	Clear communication and welcome environment	I think we can sometimes become stagnant from time to time as commissioners. It might be helpful to have a commissioner team, a weekend camp as a reset, recharging, and reenergize type of thing. We used to meet regularly and none of that has happened in a while. We need to step back from commissioner service because it feels a little like lack of support.
12/10/2024 7:31:12	1-3 years	11-20 years	No	2	2	3	3	3	3	3 either by email, text messages	more information to come thinking about this one	will have to think about this more and will give more feedback at a later time	can't think of any
12/10/2024 9:42:31	10 or more years	20 years or more	No	5	5	5	5	4	5	Maybe an email to the Assistant or Unit Commissioners when there is council meeting.	Show our commitment to the program.	Be more engaging with each other. We all get together once a year. Maybe more times.	I think there is a lot of units do not know who their assigned commissioner is for their unit.
12/10/2024 16:28:26	10 or more years	20 years or more	Yes	5	5	4	4	3	4	Monthly or quarterly district level commissioner meetings	More individual coaching	In lieu of just district commissioners meeting with council, include unit commissioners as well. revised commissioner reporting.	Not sure I understand the new or newly revised commissioner reporting.
12/11/2024 11:00:47	4-6 years	5-10 years	Yes	4	3	4	3	2	2	Monthly or quarterly district level commissioner meetings	More individual coaching	Find ways to encourage all commissioners to attend meetings and training.	None

